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**Disenchantment and Re-enchantment in Hans J. Morgenthau's**  
**Theory of International Relations**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis represents a re-evaluation of Hans Morgenthau's theory undertaken in the context of a revived interest in classical realism, and in the normative elements of Morgenthau's thought in particular. This reading is built on a recognition of the central place occupied by morality in Morgenthau's thought, and points to Nietzsche's and Weber's role in the articulation of Morgenthau's perspective. The thesis contributes to the ongoing reinterpretation of Morgenthau's theory by introducing and discussing the following topics and concepts: the centrality of the issue of meaning in Morgenthau's account, and its relevance to the modernity/postmodernity dichotomy; Morgenthau's commitment to the Nietzschean and Weberian diagnosis of the 'death of God'; Morgenthau's interpretation of power as meaning imposition; his examination of the disenchantment of politics; his vision of man as the source of both destruction and construction; Morgenthau's concept of thoughtful leadership, which represents the constructive force of re-enchantment in politics.

The thesis will also address the supposed tension in Morgenthau's account between his endorsement of Nietzschean and Weberian assumptions regarding the plurality of values and truths which follows the death of God, and his arguing in favour of a renaissance of tradition with all its metaphysical certainties. The present interpretation will show that this is a superficial tension, and will argue that

Morgenthau advances a viable solution to the challenges raised by contemporary politics, which tries to reconcile identity with difference, unique creativity with universal humanity, while also justifying the continuing relevance of tradition, perceived as a barrier against the proliferation of action for action's sake. The key role is held by the statesman, whose responsible imposition of meaning transcends differences and leads to order and construction in an otherwise anarchic environment. As the thesis will show, in Morgenthau's interpretation the practical skill of political leadership resolves the dichotomous choices of modernity/postmodernity and the contemporary predicament that Morgenthau perceived of the disenchantment of politics.

## **1. Context, Assumptions, Method**

In the introductory part of one of his best known essays political philosopher Leo Strauss asserts, while tackling the issue of what he calls ‘the crisis of modernity’: ‘that such a crisis exists is now obvious to the meanest capacities’(Strauss quoted in Hilail 1975, p. 81). At the time of putting this thought on paper, Strauss was telling the academic world nothing new: in emphasising that ‘modern Western man no longer knows what he wants’, that he ‘no longer believes that he can know what is good and bad, what is right and wrong’ (Strauss quoted in Hilail 1975, p. 81), Strauss echoed some of the pessimistic assessments regarding central developments within modernity, which had been formulated and reflected on since the nineteenth century. Moreover, Strauss echoed many voices within his own generation, voices of witnesses to the horrors of the Second World War, whose life experiences had made them agree with philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche: ‘God is dead’, and the world is in crisis.

Within this context, the present thesis argues that International Relations scholar Hans Morgenthau – a colleague of Strauss at the University of Chicago, and also a war survivor - should be regarded not only as is customary, namely as ‘the pope of IR’ (Griffiths 1992, p. 36), the ‘crusader’ (Aron 1966, p. 599), and the ‘leading modern spokesman’ of realism (Gilpin 1981, p. 213). As argued in this thesis, the



importance of Morgenthau's work stems from the fact that it has introduced a sophisticated kind of philosophical reflection in IR, which connects it to wider debates within the social sciences, regarding the unfolding of modernity. Morgenthau's thought is valuable and addresses ongoing topics of debate such as the status of truth and legitimacy of universal values, much discussed in the aftermath of the 'death of God', which to Morgenthau represents the defining moment for his political theory. As will be shown in the thesis, the 'death of God' constitutes an interpretation of the times which Morgenthau adopts from Nietzsche, and he sees it as the 'death' (disintegration) of an international morality 'composed of Christian, cosmopolitan, and humanitarian elements' (Morgenthau 1949, p. 191).

The central goal of this thesis is to demonstrate that, in Morgenthau's work, issues such as the unpredictabilities of human life, the individual's longing for security and certainty, and his feeling of 'homesickness' (Connolly 1988, p. 137), are constituted within an overarching theme which preoccupies Morgenthau all his life: the quest for 'meaning'. At present, is there a 'God', that is a 'meaning generator', in the international realm? What events caused his 'death', and what are the implications of such an event? What do we find in God's place? How can we overcome this 'death'? In the present interpretation, these are the questions which can be fruitfully explored in relation to Morgenthau's interest in philosophy, as a realm from which he expected support, in his 'quest for the meaning of human existence' (Morgenthau 1978, p. 64).

In the interpretation put forward in the thesis, Morgenthau implies that the 'death of God' makes the creation of meaning central to man, and that the godless world man now inhabits grants him opportunities and stimulating conditions for the unfolding of his creative capacities in this regard, but it also encompasses traps.

Furthermore, the meaning of existence and its interpretation, the credibility of its long established values, the individuals' 'will to meaning', and their relevant creative potential – all form a scholarly concern which, as will become clear throughout this thesis, Morgenthau shares with his intellectual mentors, Friedrich Nietzsche and Max Weber. This is a positive and productive reading of Morgenthau, whose innovative character stems from its discussion of the following: the role of Nietzsche and Weber in the articulation of Morgenthau's perspective; his interpretation of his mentors' diagnosis of the 'death of God'; the centrality of the topic of meaning in Morgenthau's theory; the subsequent interpretation by Morgenthau of power as meaning imposition and as an inter-relational concept; Morgenthau's examination of the disenchantment of human life and of politics in particular; his vision of man as the source of both destruction and transcendence; Morgenthau's concept of the creative, responsible and thoughtful leader, who represents the artisan of the re-enchantment of politics.

In addition to the detailed reading of relevant secondary literature, this reinterpretation benefits from the scrutiny of both Morgenthau's published writings and the full archive of his manuscripts, held at the US Library of Congress. The Morgenthau archive contains more than eighty thousand items, which make up almost two hundred boxes. It comprises papers written by Morgenthau mainly between 1925 and 1981, both in Europe and the US, and it covers unpublished lectures, drafts of published work, personal notes and diaries, newspaper clippings, and an extensive intellectual correspondence. The archive is useful in illuminating further Morgenthau's arguments made in published writings, and represents a valuable source of information, which helps one gain an in-depth understanding of Morgenthau's theory.

The thesis does not intend to examine Morgenthau's concept of the national interest in detail, or the interpretation of power in materialistic terms, both of which have been analysed by various scholars already. Instead, it addresses the concept of power interpreted as meaning imposition, and points to Morgenthau's vision on the topic as one which echoes views commonly associated with postmodern IR thinking. Without claiming that Morgenthau was a postmodern, this reading nevertheless points to the commonalities of approach between Morgenthau and IR postmodern strands of thinking, and depicts the significance of the Nietzschean and Weberian reading experiences in the articulation of Morgenthau's perspective, and in his discussion of meaning in particular. As will be shown below, postmodernism opened up the realist theory to reinterpretation, and emphasised the plurality of the concept of truth in a way which Morgenthau himself was no stranger to.

In order to better understand this discussion of Morgenthau's scholarly contribution, in what follows, the chapter will provide an elucidation of two terms which are crucial to the thesis: 'modernity' and 'postmodernity'. Following the interpretation provided by Rengger (1995), section 1.1 will portray 'modernity' as carrying two broad senses: 'modernity as mood' (the sense which permeates Morgenthau's thinking), and 'modernity as socio-cultural form' (Rengger 1995, p. 39). As will be shown below, the present thesis understands postmodernity to be a mood within modernity, 'a reaction to, or perhaps a dissolution, of modern moods and intellectual categories' (Rengger 1995, p. 200). In setting up the background for the present interpretation, the first section also draws on the work undertaken by Toulmin, Lyotard and Bauman, without however departing from Rengger's approach, which is useful to the thesis because it conveys an image of postmodernity circumscribed within modernity which fits best with Morgenthau's critical attitude.

While performing his critique of modernity as a mood, Morgenthau nevertheless places himself within modernity's soil of certainty, and he still longs for metaphysical foundations despite being critical of the human individual's need for security and certainty, as expressions of foundationalism.

Section 1.2 will provide a literature review which will comment on previous readings of Morgenthau's account, showing their strengths and weaknesses and also their relevance to the present interpretation. Section 1.2 will also unveil some of the central claims made in the thesis, which will then be summarized in section 1.3. The last section will take up the question of the methodological assumptions on which the present thesis is based, and will detail the ways in which it draws on Skinner's and Gadamer's approaches.

## **1.1 On Modernity and Postmodernity in IR**

According to Rengger (1995), modernity understood as a mood is an epoch which, he argues borrowing from Connolly (1988), carries ‘no well defined beginning or end’ (Connolly 1988, p. 2; see also Rengger 1995, p. 41), and which has ‘more to do with the growing dominance of certain ways of thinking and certain sets of assumptions than it does with discrete historical periods’ (Rengger 1995, p. 174). As Rengger puts it, we can find this sense of modernity in many different periods, although ‘it has unquestionably been given a particularly influential elaboration over the last couple of hundred years’ (Rengger 1995, p. 175). Rengger quotes approvingly Bernstein’s usage of a term borrowed from Heidegger, whose meaning mirrors that of the first sense of modernity: modernity is seen as a *Stimmung*, a mood which is ‘amorphous, protean, and shifting, but which nevertheless exerts a powerful influence on the ways in which we think, act, and experience’ (Bernstein 1991, p. 11).

While these considerations point to modernity as a philosophical question, Rengger’s second sense of modernity – as socio-cultural form – pictures it as raising sociological issues, and it echoes the institutional analysis developed by, for example, Anthony Giddens. In this latter sense, modernity is much more obviously tied to a time and place (Rengger 1995, p. 41), and it denotes ‘the structure of

modern life rather than a sense of it as a response within/to the structure of modern life' (Rengger 1995, p. 41). Rengger makes a strong case that modernity as a socio-cultural form is made up by a complex matrix of forces, and it encompasses 'cultural ones such as habits, and biological and ethnographic ones, as well as material ones such as economic and social structures' (Rengger 1995, p. 175). In Rengger's view, in terms of the economic and social structures that we usually identify as distinctively modern, the last two hundred years 'have been both encouraged by and supportive of those elements of modernity as mood that have been most obviously criticised' (Rengger 1995, p. 175). As noticed earlier, Rengger is quick to emphasise that these two senses of modernity, although often treated separately by theorists, should nevertheless be thought of in connection one to another, as two sides of a complex concept:

How and in what manner we understand 'modernity as mood' will in part depend on how we see the relations between the ontological, advocacy and conditional elements of modern social life, and thus the relations between modernity as mood and modernity as socio-cultural form (Rengger 1995, p. 115).

Coming back to the interpretation of modernity as mood in more detail, in order to illuminate this understanding of modernity, the thesis draws on Toulmin's seminal contribution (1990). The perpetuation of grand, universal narratives, and its so-called 'religion of rationality' (Toulmin 1990, p. 176) – embodied in a series of assumptions regarding humans' rational capacities, and the generalised application of methods derived from the natural sciences - are the features of modernity which prove to be of most importance for Toulmin. At the beginning of *Cosmopolis*, he

points to the debates which surround the issue of devising an all-encompassing definition of 'modernity' (that is, 'modernity as mood', in Rengger's interpretation). Nevertheless, he is quick to add that throughout the current controversy, the arguments

rest on shared assumptions about rationality. All parties to the debate agree that the self-styled "new philosophers" of the 17<sup>th</sup> century were responsible for new ways of thinking about nature and society. They committed the modern world to thinking about nature in a new and "scientific" way, and to use more "rational" methods to deal with the problems of human life and society (Toulmin 1990, pp. 9-10).

The foundation of what Toulmin calls 'the framework of Modernity', is made up of a central belief in, and trusting of, man's reason, in the rational capacities which are present in all human beings, and in the positive outcomes of using them, as serving the general progress of humankind. As Toulmin argues, thinking in terms of a universal theory was as common in the 17<sup>th</sup> century as it is today: ideas about humanity and nature, rational mind and causal matter, 'were spoken of as "allowed by all men", or "standing to reason", and they were seen as needing no further justification than that' (Toulmin 1990, p. 108). Reason is the guide in the discovery and application of universally valid principles, in sciences thought of as forming a homogeneous area of research, with similar methods being applied in all domains, no matter the disciplines' particularities and variety. Following the line of thinking inaugurated by Descartes, modern philosophy shows an abiding concern for the 'deciphering' of the processes of reasoning, granting them the status of human

characteristics universal in scope. Toulmin makes a convincing argument that if we contrast this attitude of modern thinkers with that of humanists like Montaigne, we notice a change 'from a style of philosophy that keeps equally in view issues of local, timebound practice, and universal, timeless theory, to one that accepts matters of universal, timeless theory as being entitled to an exclusive place on the agenda of "philosophy"' (Toulmin 1990, p. 24). In contrast to previous discussions of clearly practical issues, and to the respect shown for complexity and diversity (Toulmin 1990, p. 28), most modern philosophers commit themselves to questions of abstract theory (Toulmin 1990, p. 24). Philosophical inquiries ignore the particular, concrete, timely and local details of everyday human affairs, while shifting 'to a higher, stratospheric plane, on which nature and ethics conform to abstract, timeless, general, and universal theories' (Toulmin 1990, p. 35). From the oral to the written, from the particular to the universal, from the local to the general, and from the timely to the timeless (Toulmin 1990, pp. 30-5) - these are, more precisely, the four main shifts which Toulmin points to, as those which characterise the advent of modernity. Moreover, a process of secularization unfolds, one in which God comes down to earth and is variously interpreted under the roof of modernity's central concern for singularity. Zygmunt Bauman argues convincingly,

'God' stands for the idea of the 'one and only', for the 'thou shalt have no other gods before me' idea in all its countless renditions and costumes: of Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Fuhrer, of one party, one verdict of history, one line of progress, one way of being human, one (scientific) ideology, one true meaning, one proper philosophy (Bauman 1997, p. 201).



This quotation links the discussion of 'modernity' with 'postmodernity'. For almost two centuries, modernity has proved to be not only an accepted framework, but also one which nurtured debates. Nietzsche's verdict – 'God is dead' – stands as one emblematic manifestation of modernity's critical self-awareness. Modernity's employment of grand narratives and their lack of credibility, contingency, difference, insecurity, uncertainty, subjectivity – from nineteenth century's Romantics to contemporary proponents of the idea that we now live in 'postmodernity', these issues have surfaced within modernity. Today, its questioning is as actual as it was years ago, for Nietzsche or Weber, for Heidegger, Adorno or Strauss. Moreover, this questioning of modernity has intensified in the last three decades, with theorists talking about the earlier mentioned entrance into 'postmodernity' (see Lyotard 1984, Rengger 1995, Bauman 1997).

The present thesis employs the interpretation of postmodernity mentioned above, which comes from Rengger: postmodernity is a 'mood within modernity' (Rengger 1995, p. 200), it is a 'state of mind' (Bauman quoted in Rengger 1995, p. 200), not only critical of modernity, but also constructive by virtue of its reflectivity. As Bauman puts it, postmodernity represents 'modernity conscious of its true nature', taking 'a full measure of the anticipated consequences of its historical work' (Bauman quoted in Rengger 1995, p. 203), the most conspicuous features of the so-called 'postmodern condition' being institutionalized pluralism, variety, contingency and ambivalence. Showing how these concepts arise in Morgenthau's work will make up an important part of the present thesis.

A more detailed interpretation of the postmodern condition which is important in the context of the present discussion is advanced by Jean Francois Lyotard (1984). In Lyotard's view, the postmodern condition is a condition of knowledge, as it is

manifested in the most highly developed societies, the Western ones (Lyotard 1984, p. xxiii). For Lyotard, a modern science is one which 'legitimizes itself with reference to a metadiscourse', making 'an explicit appeal to some grand narrative, such as the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth' (Lyotard 1984, p. xxiii). From this perspective, and 'simplifying to the extreme', as acknowledged by Lyotard, the postmodern condition signifies 'incredulity toward metanarratives' (Lyotard 1984, p. xxiv), that is, toward the overarching totalities – the 'one and only' God, in all His embodiments - which modernity has encouraged. 'Let us wage a war on totality' (Lyotard 1984, p. 82), we are thus told. As Lyotard argues further, in postmodernity, the metanarrative apparatus of legitimation becomes obsolete, and to this obsolescence corresponds the crisis of metaphysical philosophy, whose consequences cut deep: 'the narrative function is losing its great hero, its great voyages, its great goal' (Lyotard 1984, p. xxiv). Echoing Bauman's assessment, Lyotard emphasises postmodernity's respect for contingency and heterogeneity as one of its outstanding merits, and he contrasts it to modernity's propensity for certainty and homogeneity. In Lyotard's assessment, postmodern knowledge 'refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable' (Lyotard 1984, p. xxv).

Critics of the core assumptions of modernity outlined above argue that, in the aftermath of God's death, there is no way that we can talk about an epistemological and moral unity of humankind, about universal principles, that men can arrive at with the use of their reason. On the contrary, in such elusive times, each one of us is free to 'devise his own virtue, his own categorical imperative' (Nietzsche 1971, p. 134). Each one 'creates a meaning for the earth' (Nietzsche 1954, p. 144): we are free to

interpret everything, to be critical and reflective. There is no single one 'reality', but a multiplicity of interpretations, no 'truth', but oceans of perspectives. These times offer to human individuals conditions for the fuller expression of their potentialities, granting them what has been long denied.

However, as some scholars have pointed out, this liberation from the 'one and only' God of modernity also comes at a price: the loss of certainty and security. In Bauman's assessment, 'you gain something, you lose something else in exchange: the old rule holds true today as it was true then' (Bauman 1997, p. 13). As Bauman argues further, while there are postmodern men and women who 'find the open-endedness of their situation attractive enough to outweigh the anguish of uncertainty', and who keep options open to all fixity of commitment (Bauman 1997, p. 13), nevertheless, many are still bewildered by 'the paucity of sense, porousness of borders, inconsistency of sequences, capriciousness of logic and frailty of authorities' (Bauman 1997, p. 124), and who crave for security and certainty. For them, modernity's evolving into postmodernity, and the latter's gifts - increased prospects for action, for creativity - are less valuable than the modern way of life, with all its embodiments. Unfortunately, security and freedom can hardly ever be fully reconciled (Bauman 2001, p. 5), and this gives birth to postmodern discontents nurtured by freedom rather than by oppression, which come from the kind of society 'which offers ever more individual freedom at the price of ever less security' (Bauman 1997, p. 124). As the following chapters will show, the problematique of certainty and security is central to Morgenthau's work, and he portrays man's need of these as a metaphysical predisposition which follows the death of universal values.

The above outline of the meaning of 'modernity' and 'postmodernity' is useful for clarifying the general context which informs the present discussion of

Morgenthau's concepts of the death of God, meaning, power as meaning imposition, disenchantment and superior leadership. In what follows, this section will point to modernity and postmodernity in International Relations in particular, as the field within which Morgenthau acted, and to its moderns and postmoderns and their core assumptions.

As Jim George argues convincingly, from its disciplinary beginnings, following the end of the First World War, the IR discursive tradition has been framed in modernist terms (George 1994, p. 77). From the liberal embracing of the concept of an international community united in its rational capacities, in its allegiance to the rule of law, and in its desire to follow the path of progress in the benefit of everyone all over the world, to the realist emphasis of a universal anarchy, and a generalised struggle for power, and also to the 'unity of science' thesis, noticeable in the midst of the 'behavioralist revolution', the mainstream argument in IR bears the marks of modernity, as an ontological and epistemological attitude (George 1994, p. 77).

Michael Banks also demonstrates the modern character of IR. He contends that a major characteristic of the IR historical narrative is its 'particular reading of a single body of thought' (quoted in George 1994, p. 71), interpreted within the framework of some main traditions which, despite their substantive differences, have one thing in common: a typically modern desire to subsume their assumptions to an all-encompassing theory, built in universalist terms. IR appears as a homogenized field of knowledge, springing from homogeneous traditions, in which certain "great texts" of Western philosophy are accorded a meaning that corresponds with the real world, while others are marginalized or dismissed altogether (George 1994, p. 71). The IR theorists' search for the essential, the universal, the permanent, their conformity to assumptions, approaches and interpretations, is manifested in a vision of history

which is 'reduced to the incantations across the time, culture, and language of those whose eternal wisdom corresponds with that which is universally valid and foundationally real' (George 1994, p. 71). As argued further by George, 'great texts and great men punctuate a meaning script set, unproblematically, in dualized and dichotomized terms' (George 1994, p. 70).

Therefore, in IR modernity as a mood manifests itself in the images of the world constructed and perpetuated by various theorists, which make up the main traditions present in this field – those of realism and liberal internationalism. Taking the realist family of theories as an example, the modern way of analysing in terms of the universal, of totalities and oppositions, the attempt to discover an 'essence', an Archimedean point or a foundation, is obvious to some theorists: as George puts it, realism represents a quest for a grand (non)theory of existence 'beyond specific time, space, and political purpose' (George 1994, p. 12). Equally important, as noted by Frankel, the proponents of realism argue that there is a 'reality', and this reality is made up of things which exist independently of our thoughts and experience (Frankel 1996, p. 13). This is a world with a concrete existence, comprehensible, far from perfect, yet hardly changeable: the only world that is, 'immediately there, around us and disclosed to us by sensory information' (George 1994, p. 11). The world of international politics is constituted by states, which act in an anarchical environment, and adopt instrumental rational policies in their pursuit of power, relying on the use of force, or on the threat to use force, in order to protect their interests. Here we encounter a picture constructed around a modern 'logic of contrasts', which opposes 'war' and 'peace', 'bad' and 'good', 'anarchy' and 'hierarchy', enflamed 'struggle for power' and cold-blooded 'rationality' - to quote George again, the positivist-realist identity 'is represented as the opposition between the forces of rationality,

unity, and progressive purpose and an anarchical realm of danger and threat in permanent need of restraint' (George 1994, p. 71). For realists, this representation of the international realm is universally valid, and, as noted earlier, this is how things really 'are', and how they happen. The realist metanarrative is based on a series of universal concepts, such as: human nature, carrying within it a lust for power which is 'common to all men' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 16), structure (in the works of structural realist Kenneth Waltz), competition, anarchy, war proneness etc. This reading of realism will be dismissed as overly simplistic in the present thesis, which will expound an interpretation of Morgenthau that points to the richness and uniqueness of his thought. It will become clear that the above reading of realism does not do justice to Morgenthau's theory and its specificities, and overlooks the strong normative aspects of his work.

In a time when many realists carried on with their work informed by a concern with power and balance of power, structure, anarchy etc, others started to pursue a novel task: a re-evaluation in IR. They disassembled the pieces of the old interpretation of realism and of its 'great men' and 'great texts'. In this way, writings belonging to theorists who are thought of as predecessors (Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes) or more recent proponents of realism (E.H. Carr, Morgenthau, Kennan) have been given new opportunities to 'speak' by researchers who consider themselves to be 'dissidents', and who plead for the opening up of 'thinking space' in IR (George 1994, p. 269). Preceded by a few seminal articles (Ashley 1981 and 1984, Walker 1987), postmodernism in IR gained its power to speak with a 'strong voice' in 1989 – 1990, years which witnessed the printing of a few breakthrough contributions (Der Derian and Shapiro 1989, *International Studies Quarterly* 1990), many of which supported a reinterpretation of central realist thinkers, and of the

realist tradition more broadly. In a similar manner, the present thesis argues that the above sketch of realism built around a few concepts and dominant interpretations is inadequately equipped to capture the subtleties and originality of realist thinkers, and it intends to open up the thinking space, by examining Morgenthau's work in greater detail.

The hallmarks on which the IR postmoderns draw attention are the uncertainty of identity and community, the ambivalence and plurality of meaning (see Ashley and Walker in *International Studies Quarterly* 1990, p. 4), and the concept of reality as never complete or accessible to universalized understandings (George 1994, p. 11). IR postmoderns do not search for a source of meaning and order already in place, but show a readiness to question how order and meaning are imposed (Ashley and Walker 1990, p. 8), to focus on human life's contingencies and enigmas, and not to take modernity's appeal to totalities for granted. As argued by Ashley and Walker, in one important contribution to the debate over modernity/postmodernity in IR, this field's postmoderns

Regard every historical figuration of sovereign presence – be it God, nature, dynasty, citizen, nation, history, modernity, the West, the market's impartial spectator, reason, science, paradigm, tradition, man of faith in the possibility of universal human community, common sense, or any other - as precisely a question (Ashley and Walker 1990, p. 368).

Closely related to this topic, IR postmoderns bring into discussion the issue of the 'crisis of representation': they argue that there is 'no fixed and indubitable presence of an external object to which words, as re-presentations, might be referred', and as a

result, 'the very possibility of truth is put in doubt' (Ashley and Walker 1990, p. 378). As Ashley suggests, in such times, theorists should definitely oppose a representation that 'arrests ambiguity and controls the proliferation of meaning by imposing a standard and standpoint of interpretation that is taken to be fixed and independent of the time it represents' (quoted in Der Derian and Shapiro 1989, p. 263). Consequently, the IR field is opened up to a multiplicity of re-evaluations. No singular interpretation should prevail. No singular tradition should monopolise theorists' debates. No endeavour should be directed at making events 'fit' into old straitjackets. Within a world of dialogue, no voice should claim supremacy.

Last but not least, IR postmoderns are interested in exploring the tensions which, they believe, exist within the IR supposedly unified traditions. Taking into account the wealth of attention devoted to the examination of the realist family of theories, it is not surprising that the exploration of the inner tensions, and the provision of challenging reinterpretations of this tradition's key texts, have been of central concern to the postmoderns. Scholars are urged to think of the IR 'great texts' as ambiguous and open to a variety of ways of reading (Ashley in Der Derian and Shapiro 1989, p. 263). In *Post-Realism: The Rhetorical Turn in International Relations* (Beer and Hariman 1996) for example, postmodern theorists re-read classical realists such as Kissinger, Carr and Morgenthau, in an attempt to interpret realism 'as an ongoing discursive struggle that cuts across the traditional theory-practice, idealist-realist, and other synchronic and scholastic antinomies of world politics' (Der Derian quoted in Beer and Hariman 1996, p. 281). Meanwhile, in Walker's *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory* (Walker 1993), a much older supposed advocate of realism, such as Machiavelli, 'speaks' in a way which is very different from the standard interpretation of his work. Yet in an article



published in 1997, scholars are told to ‘forget IR Theory’, and to proceed to a new start, to theorize ‘without being constrained by the agendas, issues, and terminologies that are preset by orthodox debates’ (Bleiker 1997, p. 58). Modernity’s appeal to metanarratives, to ‘grand theories’ accounting for universal explanations and ‘totalitarian’ interpretations, is to be eschewed and, in the end, hopefully forgotten.

The debates about modernity and postmodernity, in International Relations and social theory more generally, have opened up the question of the power of meaning construction. In IR, one way in which this question has been reintroduced is through re-interpretations of classical realism, within which the re-interpretation of Morgenthau in this thesis has to be located. This postmodern opening up of interpretations encourages new readings of realism which depart from the conventional picture of realism as an amoral or immoral theory, founded on the metaphysical unity of the struggle for power. Moreover, it problematizes the concept of truth and the validity of universal morality in the aftermath of the ‘death of God’, which this reading is interested in depicting in Morgenthau. Without representing a postmodern attempt, this thesis retains this opening up for its own purposes, and challenges accounts of Morgenthau which minimise his interest in values, meaning and truth.

After clarifying the concepts of modernity and postmodernity to be used in the thesis, and after outlining the main assumptions which inform modern and postmodern readings in IR, this chapter now moves on to an overview of recent analyses of Morgenthau’s theory, in order to situate the present contribution in its proper interpretative context. The next section also discusses the interpretation Morgenthau was subjected to during the Cold War, which represents a reflection of the particular concerns of that period.

## **1.2 Old and New Interpretations**

*'People arrive at the conclusion that I am not concerned with the problem of morality. The truth is that I am too much concerned with it' (Morgenthau quoted in Russell 1990, p. 149)*

The re-evaluation of Morgenthau's theory has started off with theorists' increased concern with Morgenthau's views on morality, and morality has indeed been the central issue around which modern and postmodern readings of Morgenthau have been constructed. This literature survey starts from the same place, and it depicts Morgenthau's endorsement of a moral theory which emphasises humans' potential for both destruction and construction in the aftermath of the 'death of God' announced by Nietzsche. This section of the chapter draws on previous writings which assert the moral character of Morgenthau's theory, and on some contributions which make connections between Morgenthau and Nietzsche, and Morgenthau and Weber respectively. Unlike these writings however, this thesis is the first to analyse in depth the commonalities among Morgenthau's, Nietzsche's and Weber's thought, and to point to Morgenthau's endorsement of a vision of power understood as meaning imposition, and of responsible leadership which has the capacity to both

destroy and construct, and which imposes meaning as a way towards peace and order.

During the Cold War Morgenthau's reputation as a theorist of International Relations was predominantly that of an amoralist, and this for Morgenthau symbolised nothing less than a proof of his failure 'in the task to make my meaning clear' (Morgenthau quoted in Frei 2001, p. 204). Evidence of this dominant trend of interpretation comes from several sources. Rosecrance (1981) attests to the way in which in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Morgenthau's power theory 'was cited as an explanation and justification for the Cold War between East and West', and in later years his doctrines 'were often used to support rearmament at both strategic and conventional levels, and to rationalize the expansion of the "struggle for power" to the new nations of Southeast Asia and Africa' (Rosecrance 1981, p. 751). Moreover, Spegele calls Morgenthau 'the quintessential moral sceptic' (Spegele 1987, p. 206), while Gellman emphasises that Morgenthau's attitude towards power 'has been reproached for being too accepting' (Gellman 1988, p. 256). Perceived as nothing more than an advocacy of a cold-blooded struggle for power, Morgenthau ended up being criticised exactly for what he used to condemn so arduously: the neglect of moral considerations in the interpretation of events in the international political arena. Within this context, Krauthammer's description of Morgenthau's central plea - that 'Miss Manners for statesmen is not yet morality' - comes as no surprise (Krauthammer 1986, p. 21). A well documented researcher such as Coser follows a similar path. Although accurately pointing to Morgenthau's thinking as rooted in the German philosophical tradition, and to his moral vision, 'that refused to concede to diabolic forces total dominance in the affairs of nations', Coser nevertheless concludes that 'the moral considerations which Morgenthau had thrown out the front

door returned through the back' (Coser 1984, p. 220). As I intend to argue in this thesis, such moral commitments are far from temporary or accidental in Morgenthau's account. He never 'throws' them away, on the contrary, his theoretical edifice presupposes a moral foundation which places limits on the acquiring and use of power.

During the Cold War, a few scholars endorsed an approach which contradicted the dominant position, without however stimulating a debate on the issue. These attempts can be seen as no more than isolated exceptions, which do not constitute themselves into a strong interpretative trend. Robert Good, for instance, notes the transcendental character of Morgenthau's formal ethic in an early article published in 1960 (see Good 1960, p. 612), in which he analyses the concept of the national interest in Niebuhr's, Morgenthau's, and Kennan's works. Good claims to find it surprising that more attention has not been given to Morgenthau's views on morality and principle. As emphasised by Good, Morgenthau's theory is more sophisticated than usually assumed, and it pleads in favour of moral absolutes that set boundaries not to be trespassed in the pursuit of interest, and which 'do not permit certain policies to be considered at all from the point of view of expediency' (Good 1960, p. 612). In Good's conclusion, 'the widely held assumption' that Morgenthau has simply updated Hobbes 'does him serious injustice' (Good 1960, p. 612).

Meanwhile, in a 1977 article on the development of International Relations in the US, Stanley Hoffmann points to Morgenthau's appeal to norms, and to his desire to root the latter in the realities of politics, and 'not in the aspirations of politicians or in the constructs of lawyers' (Hoffmann 1977, p. 44). In a similar vein, in another article on the 'limits' of realism, published shortly after Morgenthau's death, Hoffmann notes the tension present in Morgenthau's work, between his awareness of

the diversity of politics, and his desire to reduce politics to a simple type 'he deemed politically prudent and ethically wise' (Hoffmann 1981, p. 657). According to Hoffmann's famous quote on the topic, it is precisely this desire which makes Morgenthau 'an idealist in disguise, a somewhat conservative liberal in revolt against other, imprudent liberals' (Hoffmann 1981, p. 657). In Hoffmann's view, between the need to debunk grandiose utopias (which grew out of his scepticism, his sense of history and his life experiences), and the need for a radical leap between politics-as-usual (which derived from his sense of logic, his awareness of the significance of the absolute weapon, and his deep concern for peace), there was a gap which Morgenthau 'never filled' (Hoffmann 1981, p. 657).

Despite these few isolated exceptions (Good 1960, Hoffmann 1977, 1981), Morgenthau's views of politics as a morally laden enterprise, and, more broadly, of morality's place and role in people's lives, have been largely overlooked, the dominant position being that according to which Morgenthau was an amoralist thinker. In Gellman's view, 'a pattern of misunderstanding and confusion' was then running through numerous assessments of Morgenthau's political realism (Gellman 1988, p. 247). Several lines of argument can be advanced in order to explain this. One possible explanation is that the misunderstanding was triggered by Morgenthau's style of argumentation, more exactly by the lack of precision and rigour, prone to nourish ambiguities and paradoxes. Jervis, for instance, takes that view that 'like any subtle and supple thinker, he voiced too many contradictions to permit ready distillations' (Jervis 1994, p. 853). As Frei puts this, on Morgenthau's part there were few explanations and even less willingness to put things in perspective (Frei 2001, p. 201): 'so convinced was he of the justice, the obviousness of his cause that he failed at times to make a convincing case for it' (Frei 2001, pp.

201-2). In Frei's account, against what Morgenthau felt was a misleading view of the world, he asserted his own view as the "right", in fact, as the only "right" perspective', and he gave his views 'the semblance of indisputable, self-evident truths' (Frei 2001, p. 201). Moreover, at times, Morgenthau displayed neither much tolerance nor much awareness of the relativity of his own views, and his statements occasionally took the tone of dogmatic positions (Frei 2001, p. 201). For Frei, it is clear that Morgenthau's style had its share of cutting short and distorting arguments:

So adamant was he in his assertions against ostensible liberal attempts to bypass, if not replace, the political realm, that these assertions were frequently misunderstood as a moral affirmation of politics – as a positive appreciation of interest and power and hence as a depreciation of law and morality (Frei 2001, p. 204).

A convincing interpretation which points to Morgenthau's response to the contextual factors is provided by Richard Ned Lebow. A former student of Morgenthau, Lebow argues that the latter deliberately emphasised certain facets of his theory, with all the risks it implied, this being 'a strategic as much as an intellectual choice' (Lebow 2003, p. 238). Lebow explains that to Morgenthau politics was undeniably about power, but in the 1940s 'he had emphasised it to the point of excluding other features of politics, as a reaction to the liberal idealist emphasis on law and morality' (Lebow 2003, p. 238). In support of his assertion, Lebow quotes Morgenthau, who in an article published in 1966 maintained that 'when the times tend to depreciate the elements of power, international relations theory must stress its importance' (Morgenthau quoted in Lebow 2003, p. 237). In a

similar vein, to Morgenthau, 'when the reality of power is being lost sight of over its moral and legal limitations, international relations theory must point to that reality', and 'when law and morality are judged as nothing, it must assign them their rightful place' (Morgenthau quoted in Lebow 2003, p. 239).

Lebow's interpretation makes Morgenthau's stances meaningful by situating them within the context of the main debates of that time – between utopianism and realism at first, then the debate upon methods in IR, stirred by the so-called 'behavioralist revolution' (this is a method also applied in the present thesis, which partially relies on Quentin Skinner's approach, as detailed in section 1.4). While reacting to liberal internationalism, Morgenthau deliberately emphasised the power element of politics, as a central concept 'which allows the observer to distinguish the field of politics from other social spheres, to orient himself in the maze of empirical phenomena which make up the field of politics, and to establish a measure of rational order within it' (Morgenthau 1971a, p. 31). By applying this strategy however – and with the lack of precision and detail noticed by Frei - he inadvertently appeared to reject any attempt to ascribe moral values to politics. Moreover, while an active participant in the debate over method, Morgenthau's scarcely explained inclusion of the 'six principles of political realism' in the second edition of *Politics among Nations* led to him to being interpreted as a 'hard-nosed positivist' (Nobel 1995, p. 65), despite his constant rejection of positivism and his appeal for a sensible understanding of his claims (see Morgenthau 1962a, p. 24). All these issues have concurred to paint a simplistic and misleading yet extraordinarily enduring picture of Morgenthau, which has only recently come under considerable attack.

Decades passed before the alleged amorality of Morgenthau's theory started to be questioned more systematically. At present, the balance appears to have been

reversed: after a plethora of readings which emphasised the power struggle as the first – and even the only – principle which underpins Morgenthau's theory, recent revisionist works draw attention to its defining moral facet, and to Morgenthau's commitment to the Judeo-Christian tradition of moral inquiry (Russell 1990, Murray 1996 and 1997, Frei 2001, Molloy 2002). Furthermore, as indicated below, many re-evaluations point to the commonalities among Morgenthau and figures as diverse as Thucydides and Clausewitz (Lebow 2003), Augustine (Murray 1996 and 1997), Nietzsche (Petersen 1999, Frei 2001), and Weber (Frei 2001). These ongoing assertions of various positions share a common ground in pointing to Morgenthau's moral claims. Their aim is to rediscover Morgenthau's political theory, and to assert its relevance to present day developments, while also reconstructing and reassessing the principles of classical realism itself, as a relevant tradition.

One of the pioneering contributions to address Morgenthau's normative claims is Russell's *Hans J. Morgenthau and the Ethics of American Statecraft* (Russell 1990). Russell's key project regards the unearthing of Morgenthau's largely neglected moral commitments, and of the latter's importance in the context of Morgenthau's political theory. Russell discusses Morgenthau's trust in what he calls 'the perennial truths of philosophy', and asks the all important question: is Morgenthau really amoral, as most scholars proclaimed throughout the Cold War, or should we trust his expression (be it less obvious) of commitment to moral values which are universal in scope? After a thoroughgoing reinterpretation of his writings, Russell argues that Morgenthau did not lie to himself or to the others: he espoused an 'abiding concern for those ethical vitalities – the compelling force of judgments that give value and meaning to life – that distinguish the human condition in all its conflictual and cooperative dimensions' (Russell 1990, p. 148). For Morgenthau, the moral law was



sacred: principles of morality were 'binding for the conduct of all men regardless of nationality', with each man having a noble and universal obligation to mankind (Russell 1990, p. 151). This vision, applied to his field of theoretical inquiry, led Morgenthau to argue that any international political theory 'is a reflection of certain philosophic propositions', the intellectual horizon of the political theorist extending 'to the identification and analysis of objective, general truths that exist regardless of time and place' (Russell 1990, p. 60). Russell is quick to indicate that Morgenthau's continuous reference to a transcendent realm of values is vague, 'more implicit than explicit, and without clearly defined roots in any philosophical or theological system' (Russell 1990, p. 164). However, he also emphasises that with the help of this reference to a framework of moral principles with universal applicability Morgenthau's realist theory gains depth (Russell 1990, p. 69). In light of this interpretation, Russell concludes that 'if Morgenthau's position continues to raise doubts about the moral significance of political action, this is largely attributable to the relationship between his estimate of man's nature and the use of transcendent norms in political analysis' (Russell 1990, p. 169).

A similar, more recent interpretation which emphasises Morgenthau's moral approach to politics, is that of Benjamin Mollov (2002). Mollov's key project is that of depicting the influence that anti-semitism and his German-Jewish heritage had on Morgenthau's political thought, and it is within this context that he unearths the moral foundation of Morgenthau's theory. He outlines Morgenthau's close connection with the Jewish community, and goes on to analyse the spiritual aspects of his thought, with an emphasis on its transcendent character. According to this recent assessment, the main transcendent elements present in Morgenthau's theory concern 'morality in politics and statecraft', 'the responsibility of the intellectual to

speak “truth to power”, ‘the importance of philosophy to Morgenthau’s approach to international relations’, and his sustained emphasis upon the ‘spiritual forces in man and politics’ (Mollov 2002, p. 22). Just like for Russell earlier, these features support an assertion which recently has started to gain ground: ‘Despite his image as a *Realpolitik* thinker, Morgenthau throughout his career grappled with moral, philosophic and spiritual issues’ (Mollov 2002, pp. 31, 203).

An important trend in the ongoing re-evaluation of classical realism concerns its reconsideration as a political tradition, and within this context several interpretations of Morgenthau’s thought have been published lately. For instance, in one of his most recent contributions (Lebow 2003), Lebow builds upon an argument previously made by Gellman – who, writing in 1988, emphasised that Morgenthau ‘comes remarkably close to Thucydides’ in arguing that the struggle between nations is ‘located essentially in human nature, and only then in the conditions of international affairs’ (Gellman 1988, p. 253). In his reading however, Lebow’s main argument is that Morgenthau and Thucydides, but also Clausewitz, share a sophisticated tradition: what he calls ‘tragic realism’. Clausewitz and Morgenthau did not write tragedy, but according to Lebow, they did share Thucydides’ ‘tragic perspective on life and politics’ (Lebow 2003, p. 20). These three thinkers address similar problems but in different cultural settings (Lebow 2003, pp. 61-2), and in their thinking, there is no fundamental contradiction between ethics and interests (Lebow 2003, p. 61). As Lebow is keen to emphasise, they envisage ‘a hybrid order that would maintain or resurrect the best features of the old system, but accommodate the kind of changes that were either unavoidable or held out the prospects of benefits’ (Lebow 2003, p. 33). As this thesis intends to point out, Morgenthau’s awareness of the tragic character of life shows up in his theory forcefully, and from this perspective,

Lebow's account provides some useful insights. I will come back to Morgenthau's 'tragic' notion of life in chapter 3, where I will assess the way in which it is embedded in Morgenthau's metaphysics, relying on Nietzsche's and Weber's diagnosis in the process.

Lebow portrays Morgenthau as a German and American intellectual and refugee, and he emphasises the importance of the inter-war life experience in the shaping of Morgenthau's perspective (Lebow 2003, p. 16): this experience 'brings politics, culture and scholarship together in the most pronounced way' (Lebow 2003, p. 40). For Morgenthau, power is 'the starting point, but by no means the end point, of his analysis of international affairs' (Lebow 2003, p. 217). Lebow points to Morgenthau's ethical concerns, to his focus upon the concept of justice, and his awareness that concepts of ethics 'are shaped by cultural and historical experience, and must be considered in context' (Lebow 2003, p. 16). Last but not least, Lebow also maintains that by 1970, Morgenthau had become 'guardedly optimistic' about the prospects for a far-reaching transformation of the international system (Lebow 2003, p. 243). This assumption regarding Morgenthau's growing optimism, outlined by Lebow and widespread among IR scholars, will be addressed in future chapters, in light of evidence which points to the complexity of the issue, and questions Lebow's claim.

Another original reinterpretation of tradition is performed by Michael C. Williams (2005). Williams reads Morgenthau within the context of bringing arguments for proving the existence of a tradition which he calls 'wilful realism'. This is a tradition which propagates 'a continual concern with the relationship between knowledge and politics, the politics of knowledge, and a strong advocacy of the need for a politics both informed and suitably chastened by an understanding of

the limits of knowledge' (Williams 2005, pp. 5-6), and which seeks 'a politics of limits that recognizes the destructive and productive dimensions of politics, and that maximizes its positive possibilities while minimising its destructive potential' (Williams 2005, p. 7).

As pointed out by Williams, Morgenthau addresses both the destructive and constructive forces of politics, and he attempts to develop an understanding of domestic politics and foreign policy 'that restrains modernity's worst potentials while retaining its principled and productive possibilities' (Williams 2005, p. 8). Williams is preoccupied with the articulation of the concept of 'politics' in Morgenthau's thought, as a moral and political project placed within the confines of a modernity 'whose loss of belief in the power of the divine, and of an interest in religion, has left individuals in an anomic condition, and whose societal rationalisation has increased the feeling of powerlessness' (Williams 2005, pp. 121-2). Within this context, and following some earlier arguments (Walker 1993, Der Derian 1996, Guzzini 1998, p. 228), Williams emphasises the strong affinities between classical Realism – that is, between Morgenthau - and postmodern approaches, the existence of unbreachable chasms in this regard being for Williams 'simply fallacious' (Williams 2005, p. 164).

In the interpretation put forward by Williams, Morgenthau implies that uncertainty is the only thing we can be sure of in present times. The death of God, once proclaimed by Nietzsche, manifests itself forcefully within the field of politics, and the outcomes of this situation are often emphasised: the lack of fixed understandings of the good and the true stands as 'the condition of modern politics, and the basis of its distinctiveness as a realm of freedom, creativity, and change' (Williams 2005, p. 7). As emphasised by Williams, for Morgenthau, a correct

understanding of the concept of politics is essential if a recognition of the role of power in politics is 'not to be equated with a simple reduction of politics to nothing but power and violence, and Realism reduced to little more than a crude form of *realpolitik*' (Williams 2005, p. 84). In Morgenthau's account as spelled out by Williams, politics is 'potentially a remarkably destructive dimension of human action', yet at the same time, it is also 'the protean centre of social life' (Williams 2005, p. 116). As Williams adds further, Morgenthau endorses a creative vision of politics, and 'views the indeterminacy of politics as a potentially positive phenomenon, representing the possibility of change, and as a core principle of democracy' (Williams 2005, p. 116).

A different account from Lebow's and Williams', which pictures realism as a tradition of political ethics and a form of Judaeo-Christian imperfectionism, is provided by Murray (1997). Unlike Lebow's and Williams', Murray's endeavour is directed towards portraying Morgenthau, Niebuhr and Kennan as exponents of what he calls 'Christian realist thought'. In Murray's account, the central themes which connect these thinkers' works are represented by the emphasis upon the transcendental moral code, and by the attempt to strike a balance between power political and cosmopolitan moral components. As Murray maintains, an explicitly Judaeo-Christian set of values permeate the realists' approach, and any reinterpretation of their moral theory 'must seek to understand how the concern with cosmopolitan moral principles fits with their emphasis on power politics' (Murray 1997, p. 8).

Murray points to the centrality ascribed to the critique of rationalism in the thought of Niebuhr, Kennan and Morgenthau, and he argues that the account of realism as part of the conservative rationalist orthodoxy is 'fundamentally mistaken'

(Murray 1997, p. 17). To Murray it is clear that realists consider choices to be constrained within the bounds of natural possibility, directed by the flow of historical trends, and conditioned by the historical context: 'it is ultimately of the essence of realism that man is incapable of directing history according to some rational plan' (Murray 1997, p. 75). Moreover, Murray maintains that the apparent contradiction produced in realism by its simultaneous affiliation to both the tradition of power politics and the tradition of Judaeo-Christian ethics 'cannot be resolved adequately by interpreting realism through the lens of the tradition of pessimism centred around Thucydides, Machiavelli and Hobbes' (Murray 1997, p. 45):

We find ourselves in a circular process in which, once the realists are identified within this tradition, it is inevitable that confirming evidence becomes standard, and dissenting material becomes an anomalous contradiction or cynical self-justification. It is this structure which perhaps explains the extended dominance of amoral readings of realism, and the inability of revisionist writers to take the final step and provide an integrated account of the theory (Murray 1997, p. 46).

Most importantly, Murray argues that at the core of the realist theory stands an Augustinian 'dialectic of absolutes', in which absolute principles are maintained in tension with the requirements of political survival (Murray 1997, pp. 18, 73). In this account, the attempt to provide a framework in which a transcendental morality could be combined with a realistic appraisal of the conditions of life was central to Augustine (Murray 1997, p. 48), and it is exactly this attempt the one which Murray finds in Morgenthau as well. The latter's is a sophisticated theory, replete with indications of a broader concern with the intersubjectivity of phenomena (Murray

1997, p. 74), and informed by a return to pre-rationalist modes of thought (Murray 1997, p. 47). In Murray's interpretation, Morgenthau returns to Augustine's attack on classical rationalism in order to make his own critique of modern rationalism, and moreover in order to find a framework within which to relate his moral statements to the power political facet of his theory (Murray 1997, pp. 47, 58).

Thus, unlike Lebow who integrates Morgenthau within a tradition of tragic realism, along with Thucydides and Clausewitz, and unlike Williams who points to wilful realism and its postmodern innuendos, Murray focuses on what he calls Christian realism and its inspiration (St Augustine) and followers (Morgenthau, Niebuhr and Kennan). All of these scholars discuss Morgenthau within different projects regarding the re-creation of a tradition. While their objectives diverge, what they significantly share is an awareness of Morgenthau's moral concerns, and of the centrality ascribed by Morgenthau to values within his theory. The present thesis is based on the same recognition of the central place occupied by morality in Morgenthau's thought, and points to Morgenthau's scholarly interest in the imposition and stabilisation of meaning and values. This reading will nevertheless add to the interpretations summarised above, by demonstrating Morgenthau's working out along a tension between assumptions regarding values typically modern and postmodern respectively, and his development of a solution to the dichotomous normative choices of modernity and postmodernity which emphasises the creative role of the superior human actor.

Coming back to Murray's assessment, this thesis would like to point that St Augustine is one of the thinkers Morgenthau points to explicitly when asked about the influences which he absorbed throughout his career: in the unpublished, little known private correspondence, Morgenthau maintains that in the early years,

Nietzsche, Husserl and Dilthey were some of the predominant influences, while later on in his career the writings of Aristotle, St. Augustine and Niebuhr were of the greatest importance (Morgenthau to Samuel Magill, 24 November 1961, Morgenthau Papers, Box 39, page 1). Considering the central place occupied by Morgenthau in IR theory, it is noteworthy that only in recent years systematic and detailed attention has been granted to Morgenthau's scholarly development in his native Germany, and to the influences which shaped his thought in various ways.

While Murray focused on a later influence, a few other scholars have chosen to highlight Morgenthau's early intellectual encounters. Within this context, as emphasised by Michael Joseph Smith (1987), Morgenthau's relationship with Weber is of considerable importance. In Smith's interpretation, there are five themes which make up Weber's contribution to realism: his definitions of the state and politics; his view of international politics as an unending struggle among nations; his nationalism; his concern for leadership and lastly his formulation of the moral problem in statecraft as a conflict between an ethic of conviction and an ethic of responsibility (see Smith 1987, pp. 20-45). In discussing Weber's impact on Morgenthau's thought, Smith emphasises that questions regarding Morgenthau's supposedly amoral approach miss the point altogether. Just like Weber, Morgenthau was deeply concerned with morality, and to Smith this concern is all too obvious. Moreover, he situates Morgenthau's contribution within the context of US political developments, and argues that along with Kennan and Niebuhr, Morgenthau tried to provide American foreign policy with a moral basis, 'which accurately reflected the realities of power in a divided world' (Smith 1987, p. 18). Morgenthau's project, Smith maintains, was not to get rid of morality in politics, but 'to turn realism from a critique of utopianism and a characteristic approach to man and politics, into a



comprehensive theory that would explain the underlying essence of relations among states, illuminate the moral problem in statecraft, and provide a sound basis for evaluating specific contemporary problems of national policy' (Smith 1987, p. 20). As argued further by Smith, in his concept of the national interest Morgenthau claimed to define an approach to policy that would lead to both political success and ethical moderation, but his theoretical attempt failed to raise to the expectations: in Smith's critical account, Morgenthau's realism 'may provide a way to structure the political and moral dilemmas of foreign policy, but it does not prove to be an especially reliable guide to empirical success or automatic morality' (Smith 1987, p. 135).

No literature survey on Morgenthau is complete without mentioning the innovative reading provided by Ulrik Enemark Petersen (1999). Petersen's article - which is critically important for the views endorsed in the present thesis - breaks with readings such as above, and portrays Morgenthau as a political thinker influenced by Nietzsche, who struggled with issues similar to those presently dealt with by critical theory (Petersen 1999, p. 85). Petersen provides a reinterpretation of Morgenthau's concepts of power and human nature. Most importantly, he also argues provocatively against situating Morgenthau within the realist tradition itself. As Petersen contends, 'far from re-establishing continuity and stability within the realist narrative', his analysis shows that Morgenthau 'cannot in any meaningful sense be located within this narrative', and that Morgenthau's core concepts are 'developed in direct opposition to the philosophical and theoretical assumptions that fuel contemporary realism' (Petersen 1999, p. 84).

Petersen questions the 'received wisdom' regarding Morgenthau, whose hermeneutic horizon is defined by 'the rich tradition of political realism' (Gilpin

1981), and by the assumption that Morgenthau was primarily an American thinker, operating comfortably within the established certainties of modernity. He pleads instead for the thorough consideration of Morgenthau's intellectually formative years in pre-World War II Germany. In Petersen's account, this was one of the most tumultuous and creative epochs of modern thought. It was 'a period of political and philosophical upheaval and profound crisis, in which the rubble left by the collapse of established modes of thought had not yet been cleared away by viable alternatives' (Petersen 1999, p. 85). Petersen emphasises the importance of Nietzsche's and Weber's thinking in this environment, and points to the basic assumption which guides his reinterpretation, and his focus on metaphysical and ontological issues: in Petersen's view, Morgenthau, as a member of the above mentioned community, 'shared in the general task of trying to work out the implications of Nietzsche's re-articulation of the relationship between man and world' (Petersen 1999, p. 89). As Petersen claims further, Morgenthau's thought, 'far from being the instigator of modern, scientific realism, and thus the spiritual father of neo-realism and the pupil of Hobbes and Machiavelli', represents a response to the crisis of that very tradition, and marks a transition: 'rather than being in the midst of the grand narrative of modernity', Morgenthau 'is balancing on its edge' (Petersen 1999, p. 85). Thus, rather than grounding him in a tradition constituted on the firm soil of modernity, Petersen posits Morgenthau in a territory within which he questions modernity in a way that is reminiscent of Nietzsche's critique.

In Petersen's account, Morgenthau scrutinizes man and the nature of his relationship to the world. He emphasises the division which has occurred between man and the world, between self and other, 'as the collapse of metaphysical certainty throws him back into the flux, uncertainty, and conflict that define his empirical

existence' (Petersen 1999, p. 89). For Petersen's Morgenthau, the hope of identifying an Archimedean point of incontestable knowledge and pure identity is a mirage, and behind his arguments 'lies the realization that radical and pure thinking as envisaged by Descartes leads not to certainty and firm foundations, but to absurdity'. It 'does not bring man to Truth, but to himself - himself not as a universal subject capable of transcendence but as one whose fate is as a finite, limited being' (Petersen 1999, p. 89). As outlined in the present thesis, there are some indications in Morgenthau's work that point towards the possibility of transcendence. The thesis will return to the relation between man's finitude and his capacity for transcendence in the following chapters, and it will point out that this relation is more complex than Petersen suggests.

Petersen's depiction of the connection between Morgenthau and Nietzsche has recently received important evidence in its support, with the publication of Frei's *Hans J. Morgenthau: An Intellectual Biography* (2001). Frei is the first scholar to undertake an extensive research of Morgenthau's unpublished manuscripts held by the Library of Congress, and his book reconstructs Morgenthau's 'European past', and the formative influences which shaped his intellectual trajectory, as a student and young researcher in Germany and Switzerland. From these manuscripts we find out that Nietzsche was 'the god' of Morgenthau's youth (Frei 2001, p. 98), and that Weber exerted a similarly powerful impact on Morgenthau's thinking.

The young Morgenthau portrayed by Frei refers to the ongoing crisis of morality, and points that 'ours is not an age of faith' (Frei 2001, p. 145). In Morgenthau's view, in such times, anyone who wants to gain understanding 'must always be a great skeptic', he must be able to deny and abandon the firm soil of certainty. In the spring of 1936 he writes to Hugo Sinzheimer, one of his most esteemed former

professors: 'My findings lead me to the inescapable conclusion that ethics, like all the other normative realms, is in a state of total dissolution' (Morgenthau quoted in Frei 2001, p. 143). Thus, for Morgenthau, just like for Nietzsche, God is dead: as Frei explains, 'religion and dogmatic metaphysics have abdicated, all objective ranking of values has proved illusory – such as Nietzsche's diagnosis of the time (...) Ultimate values and ideals lose their normative strength' (Frei 2001, p. 142). There are no firmly established concepts of good and evil, 'it all depends on one's ultimate values' (Morgenthau quoted in Frei 2001, p. 147).

Like Petersen, Frei maintains that Nietzsche is a viable starting point for understanding Morgenthau's thought, and for locating it within a tradition which questions the received wisdom of modernity. Against the overly optimistic views of life, Morgenthau posits what Frei calls 'the tragic as an ineluctable condition of human existence' (Frei 2001, p. 185). He restores the tragic dimension to history, 'altogether in the spirit of Nietzsche, and in the best German tradition' (Frei 2001, p. 187). Last but not least, for Morgenthau, as described by Frei, such times require the emergence of strong characters, able to counteract destruction, and to impose creatively. As Frei puts it, under Nietzsche's influence, Morgenthau

had early on succumbed to an aristocratic radicalism, which induced him to value rank and greatness, the elite of the stronger, great deeds and great lives, and discipline and authority more highly than bourgeois notions of security and progress (Frei 2001, p. 157).

Frei's contribution to the ongoing re-evaluation of Morgenthau is substantial. It points to important events which marked Morgenthau's life and intellectual

development, and engages with critics who argue the case of the supposed amorality of Morgenthau's theory, by raising awareness to a multiplicity of contexts in which Morgenthau's moral commitment shines through. Frei's work differs from those of the other authors discussed above by its genre (intellectual biography), but also by its objective of interpreting Morgenthau as a scholar influenced by Nietzsche, who seeks to accommodate moral uncertainty all his life. After an examination of Morgenthau's diaries, private correspondence and unpublished papers written in Europe, Frei takes the Nietzschean intellectual heritage as a main starting point for his analysis, and works out the meaning of Morgenthau's encounter with Nietzsche and its impact on Morgenthau's theory in a way which does justice to contexts and debates. These issues will be examined in chapter 2 at length.

The scholars above provide readings that are useful to the present thesis, which intends to build on the literature, putting forward new insights regarding Morgenthau's commitment to topics and positions relevant to both modernity and postmodernity, as defined in the first section of this chapter. In what follows, I will provide a summary of the chapter by chapter argumentation of the thesis, pointing to its innovative elements and their contribution to the ongoing re-visiting of realism. As mentioned earlier, according to the view advanced here, Morgenthau's narrative addresses the central issue of meaning. To talk about meaning is to talk about morality. For Morgenthau, this is the meaning of meaning, and in this context, morality is the key concept to be analysed, when discussing the fate of man following the 'death of God'. Along with the depiction of the centrality of the topic of meaning in Morgenthau's theory, of Nietzsche's and Weber's importance in the articulation of Morgenthau's perspective, and of Morgenthau's specific interpretation of his mentors' diagnosis of the 'death of God', the present thesis will also point to

Morgenthau's interpretation of power as meaning imposition, and to his examination of the disenchantment of human life and of politics in particular. Furthermore, the thesis will bring arguments to substantiate the claim regarding Morgenthau's vision of man as the source of both destruction and transcendence, and will examine Morgenthau's concept of the creative, responsible and thoughtful leader, who represents the artisan of the re-enchantment of politics.

### **1.3 Power as Meaning Imposition; between Destruction and Construction**

The present reading is built on the assumption that there is a key concept in Morgenthau's account – meaning – and this concept will be addressed throughout the thesis. After a discussion of the historical context which is very important for the development of Morgenthau's views in native Germany, chapter 2 will introduce his fundamental intellectual encounters with Nietzsche and Weber. It will be shown that Morgenthau read Nietzsche and Weber around the same time, and he developed an interest in the diagnosis of the death of universal values which would remain a concern throughout his life. Chapter 2 will point to other intellectual encounters, both positive and negative, and will refer to Morgenthau's experience of the American academia and the latter's impact on him, and also to Morgenthau's central place in the development of post-war US realism.

Chapter 3 will explore Morgenthau's diagnosis of the times, which mirrors similar issues addressed by Nietzsche and Weber, according to the present interpretation. Morgenthau is fascinated with the issue of man's fate in present times, which are plagued by an unprecedented increase in physical danger, social disintegration, and metaphysical doubt (Morgenthau 1971, p. 621), a present when humans play a role in a story 'of inner insecurity, of the anticipation of impending doom, of metaphysical anxieties' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 9). Within this picture of the

present, Morgenthau maintains, society is not the only entity which could fulfil man's need for security and certainty: the realms of morality and religion, closely connected, should also normally perform this function. As Morgenthau reveals, however, these realms have lost their powers recently: in the twentieth century, men's 'intensified individual frustrations and anxieties', became permanent, 'as a result of the weakening of the ties of tradition, especially in the form of religion..., of increased rationalization of life and work, and of cyclical economic crises' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 77). Morgenthau is aware of the 'twilight of international morality' (Morgenthau 1948), of the collapse of the 'common roof of shared values and universal standards of action' (Morgenthau 1949, p. 269) – by which he means a moral realm composed of Christian, cosmopolitan, and humanitarian elements (Morgenthau 1949, p. 191). He argues in one of his unpublished writings that the moral order is in 'a state of total dissolution' (Morgenthau quoted in Frei 2001, p. 143), while in a later published work he decries the ascendancy of technology over morality (Morgenthau 1963c, p. 120).

Morgenthau's interpretation of the times, and of man's life within them, is a narrative about modernity's enlightened potential, but also about its gloomy consequences, brought together in a dynamic relationship. A world 'stripped' of its wonders, subjected to universalised calculation, whose art, religion and metaphysics are discredited, where we thus meet 'under an empty sky from which the gods have departed' (Morgenthau 1949, p. 196) – this is our disenchanted world, in Morgenthau's view. In such times, Morgenthau contends that humans can change the world through creating religious, moral and social worlds of their own. Morgenthau implies that this is, indeed, an era that grants man's imagination - which 'creates new worlds of religion, art, and reason that live after their creator' (Morgenthau 1962c, p.



20) - its proper place. Thus, starting from the position of 'God's death', Morgenthau follows Nietzsche's and Weber's views also in what regards human beings' increased prospects for agency manifestation, for individuals' affirmation, as one of the consequences of this 'death'. The present thesis maintains that there is no better way to understand Morgenthau's vision of contesting individuals/meanings than to focus on his concept of 'power', which in this thesis is interpreted as meaning imposition. In chapters 3 and 4 it will be shown that for Morgenthau, the process of creating and imposing power is not about gaining material power, but power of a different, non-corporeal nature, obtained after a struggle of minds and wills. The thesis will argue that Morgenthau shares Nietzsche's passion for grasping man's nature, and also his emphasis upon humans' creative potential, interpreting the well-known concept of the 'will to power' as 'the power to create meaning' (Habermas 1987, p. 95), and regarding it as a cradle of both destruction and construction. Nietzsche's 'will to power' manifests itself in offering reinterpretations of the world, and, for the German philosopher, 'to impose upon becoming the character of being' stands as the 'supreme will to power' (Nietzsche, 1968, p. 330), this latter assertion being interpreted here precisely as above, as representing one's striving to make her/his own created meaning – which has the 'character of being', namely it is well crystallised – prevail upon the others' indefinite 'becoming'. Morgenthau's narrative reveals its author's view concerning the importance of meaning creation, the possibility of human agency in a historical world (Warren 1985, p. 183), and the desirability of individual moral reconstructions, while touching upon the unfolding of phenomena whose consequences are critical for current times: nihilism and disenchantment.

While chapter 3 will address Morgenthau's metaphysics, chapter 4 will analyse the transposition of Morgenthau's metaphysical assumptions on to the political theory domain. Chapter 4 will point to a certain kind of relativism and perspectivism which in Morgenthau's view characterise the realm of politics, and will analyse power as meaning imposition - an interpretation which differs from that of power as influence (already discussed in the literature) by its emphasis on the creative value of the act of imposing meaning. Moreover, it will introduce a new concept in the literature – that of the disenchantment of politics – and will outline Morgenthau's critique of this development, which in his view renders politics meaningless. Morgenthau maintains that in the political realm, one notices a disenchantment stimulated by technological fervour and bureaucratic development, which have rendered the old, traditional values meaningless, and have exposed the political act to the temptation of acting for the action's sake. Chapter 4 will also focus on the creative facet of human nature, as represented by the responsible individual, who acts within the confines of a disenchanted political world. On the political scene, this individual is the thoughtful statesman, who imposes a particular interpretation through a creative re-working of tradition.

The analysis of Morgenthau's concepts of universality, tradition and superior leadership will form the main part of chapter 5. In the essay 'Epistle to the Columbians on the Meaning of Morality' (Morgenthau 1962a, pp. 368-74), Morgenthau argues that the disparate normative systems which have permeated humankind's history hold one thing in common: a foundation of moral understanding and valuation, which is 'impervious to the changing conditions of time and place' (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 372). The commands of this foundation, Morgenthau asserts further, are absolute and must be obeyed for their own sake (Morgenthau 1962a, p.

370). The 'Epistle' is representative for Morgenthau's 'other side' discussion of morality: he will always refer to 'the sanctity of the moral law' (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 372) – that is, to the above mentioned universal foundation of values – respectfully, as to a realm which must be 'superimposed' (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 325) on all human actions.

In Morgenthau's account, although men are born with a moral sense, this element alone is not enough for their life's fulfilment, because this process also requires transcendental orientations (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 373), orientations 'from which life receives its meaning' (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 374). Putting it most clearly, Morgenthau argues that human existence 'cannot find its meaning within itself but must receive it from a transcendent source' (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 373). Creation, and man's possibilities in this regard, following the 'death of God', now look like being granted a secondary place by Morgenthau. Instead, what is more important for him is that man's own created meanings be in harmony with what he calls 'an objective order' (Morgenthau 1983, p. 20), by which Morgenthau implies norms which 'act upon the moral consciousness of man with all the authority of aprioristic evidence' (Morgenthau quoted in Frei 2001, p. 175). As emphasised by Morgenthau, religion and philosophy of necessity require an 'objective position' outside society, and objective standards through which society can be understood, judged, and given meaning (Morgenthau 1983, p. 228).

In the field of political thought, Morgenthau pleads for a restoration of timeless elements (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 3) - as he puts it, 'political science is of necessity based upon, and permeated by, a total worldview – religious, poetic as well as philosophic in nature – the validity of which it must take for granted' (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 26). Meanwhile, in defining political action, he argues that it stands as 'an

attempt to realize moral values through the medium of politics, that is, power', and that it is only with the help of these values, springing from the above mentioned objective order, that power 'must be tamed, restrained, and transformed' (Morgenthau 1962a, pp. 110, 317).

This is the moment when the apparent tension which informs Morgenthau's vision of the present times – the tension between nihilism and morality in a disenchanted world - becomes clear. A careful reading of Morgenthau's works leads to the conclusion that, at the same time as praising the opportunities opened up by 'the death of God', Morgenthau also emphasises the consolidation of a universal moral realm, with which men's own created meanings should be harmonious – and this is the complex issue the present thesis intends to explore. Chapter 5 will show that, if judged with an eye to the contexts and debates of the time, Morgenthau's stances are not contradictory as argued by some observers. Moreover, they pave the way for a sophisticated account of leadership which retains much of the Nietzschean and Weberian ideas of the *Übermensch* and responsible political hero respectively, and represents a viable model of politics which avoids action for action's sake in the aftermath of the decline of universal values. This is a view that will be reinforced in the conclusion of the thesis, which will also point again to the relevance of Morgenthau's writings to ongoing discussions regarding the concepts of modernity and postmodernity.

Coming back to the issue of context, the thesis would like to emphasise the importance of placing Morgenthau's endeavours in illuminating contexts, and of reconstructing the questions to which Morgenthau's texts are the answers. To accomplish these tasks properly, the thesis will use two approaches. First, when reflecting upon matters of context and intentions, the analysis will be guided by the

method of studying political thinkers founded by Cambridge historian Quentin Skinner. Second, since this thesis shares the view that any text ‘must be understood as an answer to a real question’ (Gadamer 1975, p. 337), in attempting to reconstruct the questions and the answers which live in Morgenthau’s written contributions, it will follow Skinner (who addresses this issue as well), but also the considerations on the issue of textual interpretation that have been put forward by German theorist Hans Gadamer. The present reading will draw on aspects of Skinner’s and Gadamer’s approaches deemed pertinent for the task at hand, while also avoiding purism in favour of one author or the other.

The following section will explain the methodological importance of Skinner and Gadamer for the thesis in more detail, showing the ways in which elements of Skinner’s and Gadamer’s methods are useful for studying Morgenthau.

## **1.4 Methodology**

### **1.4.1 Quentin Skinner's Method**

In one of his seminal articles (Skinner 1988 [1969], pp. 29-67), Skinner accuses his colleagues in the study of the history of political thought of perpetuating three 'mythologies'. The first mythology to be described and critically assessed is also the most persistent in Skinner's view: 'the mythology of doctrines'. This mythology is driven by historians' expectation that classic writers 'will be found to enunciate some doctrine on each of the topics regarded as constitutive of the subject' (Skinner 1988 [1969], p. 59). It follows from this that, all too quickly, scholars are tempted to convert 'some scattered or incidental remarks by a classic theorist into their "doctrine" on one of the expected themes' (Skinner 1988 [1969], p. 60). Consequently, if a thinker is considered to have apparently anticipated later doctrines, he will be congratulated for his clairvoyance; when, on the contrary, he is found 'guilty of silence' on the issue of one doctrine or another, he will be criticised for falling short of his proper task (Skinner 1988 [1969], p. 64). As Skinner aptly asserts here, 'it cannot be a correct appraisal of any agent's action to say that they have failed to do something unless it is first clear that they could have had, and did in

fact have, the intention to perform that particular action' (Skinner 1988 [1969], p. 78).

Regarding the second mythology depicted by Skinner – 'the mythology of coherence' – this is perpetuated by scholars' attempt, exposed so often, of reconciling contradictions obvious in classical texts, thus going 'down the scholastic path of "resolving antinomies"' (Skinner 1988 [1969], p. 69). Pervasive and very dangerous are, in Skinner's view, the two directions – 'metaphysical in the most pejorative sense' (Skinner 1988 [1969], p. 69) – which constitute the degeneration of this mythology. The first tendency is revealed when historians of thought deem it necessary, in the interests of extracting a message of maximum coherence, to 'discount statements of intention that authors themselves make about what they are doing, or even to discount whole works that may seem to impair the coherence of their systems of thought' (Skinner 1988 [1969], p. 69). The second tendency shows up when scholars are urged by some of their colleagues to see that the correct question to ask 'is not whether the given writer was inconsistent, but rather "how are the contradictions (or apparent contradictions) to be accounted for?"', Skinner here adding, ironically, that 'the explanation dictated by the principle of Ockham's razor (that an apparent contradiction may *be* a contradiction) is explicitly set aside' (Skinner 1988 [1969], p. 70). Contradictions are thus explained in ways which try to render them a meaning that discounts their contradictory nature itself: they turn out to be thought of in terms which implicitly point to them as being coherent, when they are obviously not. The present thesis will avoid falling into the trap of this mythology by pointing to the tensions in Morgenthau's account, and to the lack of openness of explanation on Morgenthau's part as the cause of these.

Skinner also distinguishes ‘the mythology of prolepsis’, at work when scholars are more interested in the retrospective significance of a given episode than in its meaning for the agent at the time (Skinner 1988 [1969], p. 73). What the author implies is ‘decoded’ in accordance to present day discussions, rendering to a writing ‘an account of what its author was doing that could not in principle be true’ (Skinner 1988 [1969], p. 73). The characteristic of this mythology is therefore, to use Skinner once again, ‘the conflation of the asymmetry between the significance an observer may justifiably claim to find in a given historical episode, and the meaning of that episode itself’ (Skinner 1988 [1969], p. 73). The present thesis will not consider Morgenthau to be a postmodern, and will not argue that he was consciously writing post-modern theory. On the contrary, it will emphasise his importance for both modernity and postmodernity (the latter understood as a mood within modernity), while also cultivating an awareness of the Cold War and the ‘behaviouralist revolution’, in the midst of, and in reaction to which Morgenthau wrote.

Skinner’s critical notes on the study of the history of political thought form one of his contributions which this thesis will pay attention to. The other issue of interest here is his methodological approach itself. Skinner’s reputation in the field of the history of political thought was built throughout his lifetime effort to construct, and then to apply to the study of various texts, a method with whose help he has tried to recover what he calls ‘the historical meaning/identity’ of individual texts in the history of thought, seeing them as contributions to particular discourses, and recognising ‘the ways in which they followed or challenged or subverted the conventional terms of those discourses themselves’ (Skinner 1988 [1969], p. 124).

Skinner distinguishes between what he calls the ‘two dimensions of language’: the dimension of meaning, and the dimension of linguistic action, the latter - which



has constituted Skinner's main area of concern - being described as 'the study of the range of things that speakers are capable of doing in (and by) the use of words and sentences' (Skinner 1988 [1969], p. 3). For Skinner, there are two questions to be asked with reference to the meaning and understanding of texts: one is the question of what the text means, the other the question of what its author may have meant. In Skinner's view, in order that scholars understand the texts they study, both of these questions must be answered (Skinner 1988 [1969], p. 113).

For Skinner, it is the depiction of authorial intentions which makes up the main area of enquiry, although not the only one. As Skinner cautiously adds here, Austin's theory of speech acts does not tell us 'that the intentions of speakers and writers constitute the sole or even the best guide to understanding their texts or other utterances' (Skinner 1988 [1969], p. 110). Skinner urges historians of political thought to read a text 'as action in context', to pay attention to what its author is engaged in, in the way in which he 'does things with words' (Austin 1975) - attempting to make a change in the ideological context, to strengthen or weaken rival elements of it, to present a certain form of it intact against assault, or on the contrary, to give it a new twist or direction (Charles Taylor quoted in Tully 1988, p. 219). For Skinner, the essential endeavour of a scholar in the field of the history of ideas must therefore be directed towards the recovery of the intentions which animated thinkers, at the time when they wrote: he must depict what the author, 'in writing at the time he did for the audience he intended to address, could in practice have been intending to communicate by the utterance of this given utterance' (Skinner 1969, p. 63). As Skinner later put it,

There is a sense in which we need to understand why a certain proposition has been put forward if we wish to understand the proposition itself. We need to see it not simply as a proposition, but also as a move in argument. So we need to grasp why it seemed worth making that precise move; to recapture the presuppositions and purposes that went into the making of it' (Skinner 1988 [1969], p. 274).

In order to discover the 'historical meaning' of a text, it is necessary to understand 'the "point" or "force" of the author's argument' (Tully 1988, p. 9). Skinner follows J.L. Austin precisely in the analysis of what the latter labelled the 'illocutionary force' of utterances – the dimension of language in use by which speakers perform an act of a certain kind, 'engaging in a piece of deliberate and voluntary behaviour' (Tully 1988, p. 261). Following Austin, Skinner also distinguishes between the illocutionary and perlocutionary force of utterances – that is, between what we may be doing in saying something, and what we may bring about by saying something - his Austinian-like assumption being, as seen above, that speakers are able to exploit the dimension of illocutionary force in order 'to do things with words' (Tully 1988, p. 261). Skinner emphasises that the novelty of Austin's theory springs from a rigorous act of theorising a dimension of language which we all use after all: 'anyone who issues a serious utterance will always be doing something as well as saying something, and doing it in virtue of saying what is said' (Skinner 1988 [1969], p. 262). In one memorable paragraph, Skinner acknowledges that it may indeed be impossible to recover more than a small fraction of the things that Plato, for instance, was doing in *The Republic*, yet he emphasises that the extent to which we can hope to understand Plato's work depends in part on the extent to

which we can recover Plato's intentions (Skinner 1988 [1969], p. 263) – once again pointing to his assumption regarding the centrality of the analysis of intentions for the history of political thought.

Skinner illustrates his points from the main literature every time he mentions one of the assumptions endorsed by many of them, according to which the history of political thought incorporates a series of perennial questions, on a series of issues which various thinkers, from various epochs, have all tackled. Contrary to this widespread view, Skinner suggests that the history of thought should be understood 'not as a series of attempts to answer a canonical set of questions, but as a sequence of episodes in which the questions as well as the answers have frequently changed' (Skinner 1988 [1969], p. 234), and also as a history 'of the various uses to which ideas have been put by different agents at different times' (Skinner 1990, p. 85). As Tully puts it, Skinner's method is perspectival, reflective and critical, and it encourages a way of speaking 'for a more radical contingency in the history of thought' (Tully 1988, p. 176), and looks up to those attempts directed towards the challenge of well-known, 'old' interpretations. By using Skinner's method, as its author puts it, we may acquire a perspective which can enrich our knowledge: we can view our own form of life 'in a more self critical way, enlarging our present horizons instead of fortifying local prejudices' (Skinner 1988 [1969], p. 125; for an interpretation which emphasises the similarities between Skinner, Nietzsche and Weber on this critical perspective on life, see Palonen 2003). Skinner's vision of language is also dynamic. Language is not perceived only as a 'given' which constrains us, but also as a force which it is in our power to transform: language 'shapes us all', yet we also 'can use it to shape our world' (Skinner 1990, p. 7).

This thesis will show that Morgenthau endorses a vision which agrees with Skinner: his vision sees the history of political thought as a tradition informed by the same issues and questions, while also emphasising the creative re-interpretation and addressing of these issues, in light of concrete circumstances and developments. Moreover, following Skinner, the thesis will analyse Morgenthau's contribution to the field of IR with an eye to the milieu in which his thoughts took shape, and against which they were projected by a Morgenthau stimulated by precise intentions. Within this context of discussion, the thesis is informed the 'Skinnerian-Austinian' closely related questions: What was Morgenthau doing in writing such texts?, What questions was he addressing, to which questions was he giving his answers? Consequently, the thesis will show that in his works Morgenthau addressed very precise issues and concrete situations: the demise of universal values, the behaviouralist revolution, the Cold War, president Carter's human rights policy etc. Skinner's approach will thus help at understanding Morgenthau's positions by situating them in their relevant context, enriching our understanding of Morgenthau's thought by pointing to their utterance with reference to particular situations.

Skinner's method proves useful and appropriate to the examination of Morgenthau's works because it raises awareness of the language dynamic and the illocutionary force of utterances, and points to the need for situating Morgenthau's thoughts in a context which renders them meaningful. Along with Skinner's method, this thesis will employ the methodological approach devised by Gadamer, which is relevant to the current re-interpretation of Morgenthau's theory due to its provision of valuable insights regarding the subtleties of textual interpretation.

### **1.4.2 Hans Gadamer and the Interpretation of Texts**

‘We come close to the truth because we do not exist by ourselves’ (Gadamer 2001, p. 49). In this short phrase, Gadamer condensed one of his most important assumptions regarding hermeneutics: in reaching understanding, we are never alone. Understanding begins ‘when something addresses us’ (Gadamer 1975, p. 266), and it is always arrived at in a process of dialogue, in the encounter between the perspectives (‘horizons’) that different people hold. This dialogue takes place in everyday situations, but also whenever a classic text is read once again, and granted a new way to ‘speak’ by its interpreters. Gadamer considers understanding a productive attitude (see Gadamer 1975, p. 264). From this perspective, the temporal distance between the author and the interpreter must not be regarded reluctantly, and tried to be overcome, in the spirit of the ‘old’ method of historicism: on the contrary, as it is ‘a positive and productive possibility of understanding’ (Gadamer 1975, p. 264), it must be acknowledged, and be granted all the consideration it deserves.

This thesis has chosen Gadamer’s approach to the meaning of understanding because it has sought to establish a dialogue with Morgenthau’s works, a dialogue unhindered by what Gadamer calls ‘unproductive prejudgments’ – in this case, by the ‘old’ interpretations of this scholar’s ‘cold-blooded realism’, his ‘amorality’ etc. Moreover, it has decided to use Gadamer’s hermeneutical perspective because, with

its help, we are able to understand 'how certain questions came to be asked in particular historical circumstances', grasping 'the particular presuppositions whose demise makes the question no longer relevant' (Gadamer 1975, p. 338).

According to Gadamer, all understanding involves interpretation (Gadamer 1975, p. 350), as a constitutive and creative feature of human existence in the world, and a *sine qua non* universal aspect of philosophy (Gadamer 1975, p. 433). Having acknowledged this, it becomes obvious that hermeneutics is not concerned with the development of a method for understanding, but with the clarification of the conditions in which understanding takes place: these conditions, as emphasised by Gadamer, 'are not of the nature of a "procedure" or a method' (Gadamer 1975, p. 263). In Gadamer's interpretation, hermeneutics is 'an attempt to understand what the human sciences truly are, beyond their methodological self-consciousness, and what connects them with the totality of our experience of the world' (Gadamer 1975, p. xiii). This experience therefore defines understanding, making it a specific case of the application of something universal to a particular situation (Gadamer 1975, p. 278), the circular interplay involved in understanding revealing its 'ontological structural element' (Gadamer 1975, p. 261). 'Openness' stands here as a key word: within the hermeneutic dimension of our very being we are not imprisoned but opened (Gadamer 1975, p. xiv), and it is only through hermeneutical reflection that we are no longer unfree against ourselves (Gadamer 1976, p. 38). The doors opened to creativity by philosophic hermeneutics must not be shut, on the contrary: 'all that is asked is that we remain open to the meaning of the other person or of the text' (Gadamer 1975, p. 238).

In Gadamer's view, in the process of deciphering the meanings of various texts, the interpreter inevitably has to deal with his own prejudgments, as they are formed

within the tradition in which he is situated (as it will be shown in chapters 3 and 4, Morgenthau is aware of the above prejudgments too). In approaching a text, the interpreter always stands within a tradition (Gadamer 1975, p. 250), Gadamer argues, but this does not necessarily mean a bad thing: 'to stand within a tradition does not limit the freedom of knowledge but makes it possible' (Gadamer 1975, p. 324), and tradition encourages the freedom which manifests itself in the interpreter's reflectivity. This also means, however, that the interpreter should not passively accept the prejudgments contained within a tradition. Instead, prejudgments should always be challenged by the interpreter's own understanding. From this perspective, understanding here involves the interpreter's shattering of prejudgments, in view of disposing of those which hinder his understanding, and of encouraging those which nurture novel perspectives. In this context, Gadamer asserts that 'it is constantly necessary to inhibit the overhasty assimilation of the past to our own expectations of meaning', because 'only then will we be able to listen to the past in a way that enables it to make its own meaning heard' (Gadamer 1975, p. 272). Throughout the process of questioning previously gained prejudgments, during which 'past and present are constantly fused' (Gadamer 1975, p. 258), the meaning of the hermeneutical process reveals itself at its best. Its special significance springs precisely from such confrontations among differing, and differently situated, perspectives: 'the place between strangeness and familiarity that a transmitted text has for us is that intermediate place between being a historically intended separate object and being part of a tradition. The true home of hermeneutics is in this intermediate area' (Gadamer 1975, p. 263).

Gadamer's central concept of the 'fusion of horizons' is important for the way in which this thesis perceives its reinterpretation of Morgenthau. As Gadamer explains,

a 'horizon' is 'the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point' (Gadamer 1975, p. 269). According to Gadamer, one's having of a horizon does not mean that one stands within it constrained, enduring the suppression of critical thinking, on the contrary. That person is not limited to what is nearest, but able to see beyond it (see Gadamer 1975, p. 269). The dialogue with the other's horizon grants the interpreter the chance to see the new unmasked. Here, again 'openness' is the key word: 'through an encounter with the other we are lifted above the narrow confines of our own knowledge. A new horizon is disclosed that opens onto what was unknown to us' (Gadamer 2001, p. 49). Here, it is important to mention that the 'horizons' that Gadamer writes about are not rigid, but mobile, in motion because our prejudgments are constantly put to the test (Gadamer 2001, p. 47). 'The old', coming from within a tradition and perpetuated by prejudgments, and 'the new' about to be created by the interpreter's mind, cannot live one without the other, as in this way we get the aforementioned 'fusion':

The horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past. There is no more an isolated horizon of the present than there are historical horizons. Understanding rather, is always the fusion of these horizons which we imagine to exist by themselves (...) In a tradition this process of fusion is continually going on, for there old and new continually grow together to makes something of living value (Gadamer 2001, p. 273).

Another useful assumption formulated by Gadamer concerns the way in which we can know that an interpretation is plausible. Which is the criterion that we should rely on, when making such an assessment? Gadamer's answer is that in order for



understanding to be accurately arrived at, interpretation must conform to the principle according to which the whole should be understood in terms of the parts, and vice versa. Hermeneutics involves a circular relationship, Gadamer insists, throughout which 'the anticipation of meaning in which the whole is envisaged becomes explicit understanding in that the parts, that are determined by the whole, themselves also determine this whole' (Gadamer 1975, p. 258). Thus, the movement of understanding is constantly from the whole to the part and back to the whole, and the task faced by the interpreter is that of extending, in concentric circles, the unity of the understood meaning. Most importantly, it is within this context that we get Gadamer's crucial hint about the way in which we can spell out a 'verdict', and establish whether an interpretation is correct or not: 'The harmony of all the details with the whole is the criterion of correct understanding. The failure to achieve this harmony means that understanding has failed' (Gadamer 1975, p. 259). Thus, the relationship between the author and the interpreter is dynamic and open to a variety of outcomes, but a crucial criterion of their success is, in the end, the harmony which must exist between the whole and the parts.

The fact that we can establish the plausibility of an interpretation does not mean, however, that once it is acclaimed as 'correct' an interpretation may remain valid forever and in the eyes of all theorists. Gadamer's view is that interpreters should never think of their interpretations as being the 'best' and the 'final' ones, and that, moreover, they should not expect universal acceptance. Theirs is an endless task filled by difficulties: 'the discovery of the true meaning of a text or a work of art is never finished; it is in fact an infinite process' (Gadamer 1975, p. 265). Moreover, here it is important to notice the fact that interpretations depend not only on their interpreters' abilities, but also on a variety of context-related factors: in this regard,

there should come as no surprise that, for Gadamer, every age 'has to understand a transmitted text in its own way' (Gadamer 1975, p. 263), and that the real meaning of a text, as it speaks to the interpreter, is 'always partly determined also by the historical situation of the interpreter, and hence by the totality of the objective course of history' (Gadamer 1975, p. 263).

There are two common assumptions belonging to Skinner and Gadamer on which an eye will be kept throughout this thesis, and which will make the present methodological guidance adequate to the task of reinterpreting Morgenthau. First, there is the assumption that texts always raise questions related to contextual issues of debate within their times, and that by writing texts, the authors provide their own answers/solutions to these questions or problems. Second, both Skinner and Gadamer argue for audacity and unconventionality in the interpretation of past thought, for revaluations, for taking new and challenging perspectives. These two assumptions fit with the present reinterpretation of Morgenthau's theory, which will pay attention to the context-related issues, preponderantly focused upon by Skinner, but not neglected by Gadamer as well, and also to the hermeneutical insights arrived at by the latter. These elements of their methods are useful in studying Morgenthau because they help the interpreter to engage in a fruitful dialogue with the writings at hand, and to arrive at an interpretation which is relevant to present day debates, while nevertheless consciously 'speaking' to the present within the confines of a certain historical period.

This chapter has provided a set of contexts for the development of the argument. It has pointed to the literature on Morgenthau and to the common assumptions regarding his work, and it has briefly indicated the line of argumentation which will be developed throughout the thesis, with an emphasis on Morgenthau's discussion of

meaning in International Relations, and on its importance and relevance to debates regarding modernity and postmodernity. As pointed out earlier in the chapter, this interpretation differs from others which re-visit Morgenthau by its assessment regarding the centrality of the issue of meaning in Morgenthau's account, and by the importance ascribed in this regard to Morgenthau's encounter with Nietzsche and Weber early in his career. This encounter has led Morgenthau to subscribe to his mentors' diagnosis of the 'death of God', albeit interpreting it in light of concrete historical events, and to read power as meaning imposition. Morgenthau's examination of the disenchantment of human life and of politics in particular follows from his endorsement of the 'death of God' diagnosis, and he perceives man as the source of both destruction and construction. In another innovative contribution to current re-examinations of Morgenthau's theory, this thesis argues that Morgenthau's vision of creative leadership stands as the source of hope and order, and represents in Morgenthau's view a valid solution to the problems caused by death of God and the disenchantment of politics.

In what follows, the first elements of re-interpretation will begin to emerge. Chapter 2 will examine the intellectual roots of Morgenthau's approach, and will explore his heritage of European thought and his experience in the US academic environment. It is a chapter which points to certain readings or encounters which have made an impact on Morgenthau, and to their relevance to his discussion of the concepts of meaning and disenchantment, and to his commitment to a particular vision of power.

## **2. Life Experience and Intellectual Encounters**

In 1976, Hans Morgenthau was asked to indicate the ten books which meant the most to him, in an article called 'Books that Shape Lives.' In an impressive list of authors and titles, among Carr, Arendt and Plato, along with Aristotle's *Politics* and Niebuhr's *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, we find *The Collected Works of Friedrich Nietzsche* and *The Political Writings of Max Weber* (see Frei 2001, p. 113). This list constitutes one of the very few public acknowledgments of the authors whom Morgenthau considered of utmost importance to him, and whose insights he deemed relevant to his theory, and employed for his own purposes. The present chapter intends to focus on the Nietzschean-Weberian section of Morgenthau's list, and to emphasise these thinkers' special role in the articulation of Morgenthau's scholarly perspective, and of his concern with meaning and disenchantment in particular.

According to the interpretation put forward in this thesis, there are two factors which shaped Morgenthau's thinking in a profound and lasting way, and they both belong to that period between the two world wars which Morgenthau spent in his native Germany. The first factor is represented by the political context which accompanied Morgenthau's passage to maturity as a Jew in an increasingly anti-Semitic society (see Rosenthal 1991, p. 13). He faced the Great War and its

consequences: political instability, economic hardship, moral decay, and the escalation of hatred and intolerance, as perpetuated by the Nazis. These early confrontations with a polarised and hostile environment left an enduring mark on Morgenthau's development, and led to his embrace of a confrontational, dynamic and tragic vision of politics (see also Frei 2001, p. 16).

Secondly, and more importantly, this thesis suggests that attention should be paid to the intellectual context in the midst of which Morgenthau grew up as an academic, and to the ideas by reference to which he positioned himself. After outlining the characteristics of the German inter-war intellectual environment, the chapter will focus on those key influences which were assimilated by Morgenthau at an early stage of his academic training, and which shaped his perspective in his main areas of academic concern: the forces at work in international politics, man's life and nature, and morality in a post-metaphysical age.

The present assumptions regarding the importance of Morgenthau's 'German years' in the development of his thinking are, to be sure, nothing new: the unearthing of Morgenthau's lifework in Germany and Europe represents a focus of several scholars' investigation (Amstrup 1978; Thompson 1980; Sollner 1987; Honig 1996; Pichler 1998; Frei 2001; Mollov 2002). With the help of Morgenthau himself, who approached these issues in an interview with Bernard Johnson (Thompson and Myers 1984, pp. 333-386), and also in an article first published in 1978 (Morgenthau 1978, reprinted in Thompson and Myers 1984, pp. 1-17), scholars have reconstructed Morgenthau's personal and intellectual 'itinerary' in his native Germany and in Europe more broadly, with a view to disclosing the major experiences which marked the evolution of his thought. Some of them (see Amstrup 1978) have looked mainly at Morgenthau's early writings published in Europe, which dealt with issues

pertaining to the domain of international law. Starting from the biographical data available, others (see Mollov 2002) have interpreted Morgenthau's commitment to a vision of the world supported by moral values with universal application, as a symbol of a hope for transcendence which sprang from a terrible life experience. Last but not least, the study published by Frei in 2001 has brought to light many interesting comments made by Morgenthau regarding the years spent in Germany and his intellectual companions in those times. Frei's study focuses on Morgenthau's thoughts as expressed in his diaries and letters written as a student and incipient academic in Europe, and it contributes to the ongoing re-reading of Morgenthau as a normative thinker.

Why is it worth coming back to Morgenthau now? What is important and specific about his work? The answers to these questions are spelled out in this chapter. Both Nietzsche and Weber are central to current discussions on 'modernity' and 'postmodernity', and this thesis argues that Morgenthau's relevance for present day International Relations stems from the Nietzschean-Weberian core of his ideas (while putting Nietzsche and Weber together, the present interpretation also acknowledges the existence of an 'intellectual debt' that Weber himself owed to Nietzsche, a debt which has been thoroughly documented elsewhere - see Hennis 1988, esp. pp. 146-62; Owen 1991, 1994; Warren 1992; Szakolczai 1998). According to the views advanced in the present thesis, Morgenthau takes the diagnosis of 'modernity' as a theme of philosophical and political reflection from Nietzsche and Weber, and he makes it its own, dealing with the issues of the loss of meaning and the disenchantment of politics extensively. Morgenthau assumes, in a Nietzschean-Weberian fashion, that 'ours is not an age of faith' (Frei 2001, p. 145). He mirrors Nietzsche's and Weber's concern for the fate of values in modernity, and

his views are populated with the dynamic Nietzschean-Weberian picture of a battle among opposed value standards (within this context, it comes as no surprise that scholars' recent interest in the 'European' Morgenthau has coincided with the rediscovery of the normative core of Morgenthau's ideas). Moreover, while raising awareness about the dangers of nihilism and disenchantment, Nietzsche's and Weber's account also sheds light on man's potential for creation through responsible action. This dualistic vision is replicated by Morgenthau.

The present thesis acknowledges that there are other intellectual companions that can be highlighted when writing about Morgenthau, and the list provided by Morgenthau in 1976 is all but exhaustive. This reading also attempts to raise awareness of the importance of the 'American context', in the midst of which Morgenthau wrote his main academic texts. Most importantly however, this interpretation shares with other scholars one crucial assumption, according to which Morgenthau developed some essential concepts on the nature of politics before his departure to the US, and he remained faithful to them (see Amstrup 1978, esp. p. 173; Frei 2001). Moreover, this study suggests that Morgenthau did not find US philosophy potentially useful to his approach, and that he therefore did not attempt to incorporate it into his theory, as he had previously tried to do with psychoanalysis, for example. In light of the assumption above, this thesis maintains that the 'German context' is the one which deserves to be approached first and foremost when discussing the particularities of Morgenthau's political theory.

Let us start with some biographical data and brief comments on the political context which accompanied Morgenthau's development in native Germany. The chapter will move on to an outline of the mentors and negative influences during Morgenthau's academic beginnings, and it will then develop into a detailed account

of the impact of Nietzsche, Weber and of the American academic environment on Morgenthau.



## **2.1 A Motivating Life Experience**

Hans Morgenthau was born in 1904 in the German city of Coburg, as the only child of a German-Jewish family. Currently a part of north eastern Bavaria, Coburg is granted by some historians the reputation of being 'the first Nazi town' (Hayward and Morris 1988). It is here that the National Socialist Party had a strong nucleus from its very inception, here Adolf Hitler made his debut public speech, in 1923, and here the Nazis celebrated their first victory in local elections, in 1929.

Morgenthau's adolescence was marked by a series of political developments which succeeded at a high pace, in less than a decade, leading to a German inter-war highly polarised environment, and to multiple level crises – to a 'a disintegrating society', as Morgenthau would later put it (Morgenthau 1978, p. 66). The majority of Germans believed that the Great War was 'fresh and joyous' (Morgenthau quoted in Thompson and Myers 1984, p. 334), and just like them, in 1918, young Morgenthau still felt 'fully confident' that the justice of the German cause would lead Germany to victory (Frei 2001, p. 15). Soon, however, a plethora of events succeeded quickly: the unexpected armistice, the November 1918 revolution, the Weimar constitution, and then an economic inflation which brought an 'enormous moral, economic, and social devastation' (Morgenthau quoted in Thompson and Myers 1984, p. 335). In Morgenthau's words, all these made up a very bad period, which 'was of great

benefit to the Nazis', 'really' opening the door for them (quoted in Thompson and Myers 1984, p. 337).

From an early age, Morgenthau faced the consequences of the propagation of what he would later call 'the stab in the back legend', according to which 'the German armies had not lost the war, but had been stabbed in the back by traitors from within', such as trade unions, socialists, Jews, Catholics, Liberals, Free Masons and so on (Morgenthau quoted in Thompson and Myers 1984, p. 335). Subsequently, he became more and more aware that his relation with the world around him would be forever influenced by three factors: he was a German, a Jew, and a boy whose maturation had taken place in the period following the First World War (see Frei 2001, p. 24).

Around that time, Morgenthau lived as trapped between two poles: a 'cruel and utterly devastating' anti-Semitism (Morgenthau quoted in Thompson and Myers 1984, p. 339), and the domestic reality of a household under the command of his 'rather neurotic and oppressive' father Ludwig (quoted in Thompson and Myers 1984, p. 337). In the process of facing his father's authoritarianism, and also the German anti-Semites' hostility, he felt the need to be away from companionship: his life experience also led to his withdrawal from the outside world (Frei 2001, p. 23), and made him 'serious', 'taciturn' (Frei 2001, p. 23), shy and with great fear of being rejected (Morgenthau quoted in Thompson and Myers 1984, p. 339). Morgenthau retreated into his own shell 'in fear of disappointing human contacts' (Morgenthau quoted in Thompson and Myers 1984, p. 339), and focused on study. However, even within school's walls, life was far from easy for him in those times. As the only Jew, and also the best pupil in his class, Morgenthau often had to go through 'terrible experiences' (Morgenthau quoted in Thompson and Myers 1984, p.

339), such as that of being shouted insults upon his delivering of a speech at the celebration of the founder of the town, the Duke of Coburg (see Thompson and Myers 1984, pp. 340-1). As argued by Joel Rosenthal, 'it is difficult to judge how prejudice might have affected the young Morgenthau and to what extent it shaped his views, but there can be little doubt that the effect was traumatizing and long-lasting' (Rosenthal 1991, p. 13).

Unsurprisingly then, the ideas expressed in Morgenthau's school compositions were often a mirror of his own experiences. In many of these papers, Morgenthau made it clear that he regarded negatively the blaming of the Jews for the difficulties experienced by the German people in the inter-war years. Moreover, he was eager to point out that the accusations directed against him as a Jew, were 'totally unjustified'. Pleading in favour of his innocence, Morgenthau considered the hostile actions evoked by those accusations 'a crying injustice and a dishonouring humiliation' (Morgenthau quoted in Mollov 2002, p. 79). Moreover, at the end of an analysis of his fellows' behaviour, he concluded in a remarkable paragraph that people 'could live together in harmony if only they let their conduct be guided by the moral law', but also that harmony among men is difficult to achieve, since man's nature 'is prone to inclinations that can thwart all law-abiding conduct in their unbridled power' (quoted in Frei 2001, p. 104). Sources of motivation and toughness of spirit, such experiences exerted an impact on young Morgenthau's assumptions regarding life's meaning, dynamics and complexity. In one of the lectures delivered in the US, years later, when speaking about men's 'inclinations', Morgenthau would point to the opportunities that the Nazi rule offered for satisfying the human longing for power, Nazis' racial policy representing 'a deliberate device to give at least partial satisfaction to otherwise unsatisfied power drives', a doctrine which 'gave

meaning to life' (quoted in Mollov 2002, p. 98. An extensive discussion on this topic will be performed in chapters 3 and 4 of the thesis).

Coming back to Morgenthau's adolescence, it is important to mention that, at that time, Morgenthau felt 'embittered by the years of loneliness, excluded from all the joys of youth, rejected' (quoted in Frei 2001, p. 11). In one of his last high school compositions, he admitted that he had two hopes: he hoped for the lifting of the pressure to which he was exposed by the social environment, and also to find 'a direction and a purpose' for his future activities (Morgenthau 1978, p. 63). In the same paragraph, Morgenthau concluded that 'the latter cannot be realized before the former is fulfilled' (Morgenthau 1978, p. 63). Subsequently, Morgenthau left Coburg in 1923 in order to pursue undergraduate studies at the University of Frankfurt.

## **2.2 Studies, Mentors, Negative Influences**

The intellectual context in which Morgenthau's academic development took place paid tribute to the political and economic background that animated post-war Germany. The Great War had a tremendous impact all around Europe, yet it was in Germany that its most radical consequences unfolded: in Steven Ascheim's analysis, the cheapening of life and the infusion of greater linguistic and physical violence into the public realm 'may have been a generally European phenomenon, but in Germany it was exacerbated by defeat, revolution, and the persistent socioeconomic crisis' (Ascheim 1992, p. 19). As Ascheim argues further, it was a period of 'radical dislocation and polarization', whose evolutions 'increasingly provided the space for politically extremist alternatives' (Ascheim 1992, pp. 154, 155). Struggles on the political scene – often taking the form of open street confrontations between proponents of different ideologies - were replicated onto the intellectual one, where discussions regarding the struggle among values in modernity, and the emergence of strong, responsible leadership, blended with the critique of liberalism, and with discourses which emphasised the perils of technological thinking and practice. Morgenthau's development took place in this heterogeneous space of intellectual concerns, in which he immersed and later also sought to make his own criticism heard, while engaging with some of the major strands of thought of the time.

Moreover, Morgenthau positioned himself through the thinkers he deemed relevant to his academic concerns, especially Nietzsche and Weber, whose ideas were central to inter-war German intellectual debates (see Ascheim 1992). He self-consciously used Nietzsche and Weber to develop his political theory, and explored the topic of the 'death of God' at length in his works, with the loss of meaning and the disenchantment entailed by it.

As a teenager, Morgenthau was eager to bring his writing style up to perfection (a concern which would preoccupy him all his life), and he developed an interest in philosophy and literature (see Morgenthau 1978, p. 63). Upon leaving high school, he wanted to embark on the undergraduate study of literature, but after several discussions with his father, who was against such a potential choice, he realised this would not happen. Subsequently, in 1923, Morgenthau went to the University of Frankfurt with the aim of studying philosophy – in his own words, 'philosophy, so I thought, would answer my quest for the meaning of human existence and unravel the riddles of the universe' (Morgenthau 1978, p. 63). Morgenthau was however quickly disappointed by the manner in which philosophy was taught in Frankfurt at the time: 'nothing but epistemology', 'quite boring' (Morgenthau quoted in Thompson and Myers 1984, p. 342). He moved to Munich to study law after only one semester: as Morgenthau explained this, 'once the fields in which I was really interested were eliminated – academic philosophy in view of its lack of emotional appeal and literature because of the paternal veto – law appeared to make the least demands on special skills and emotional commitment' (Morgenthau 1978, p. 63).

Not feeling attracted to law, while in Munich, Morgenthau limited his attendance to law lectures 'to the bare minimum'; instead, he took various unrelated courses, whose subject matter and professors nevertheless interested him (Morgenthau 1978,

p. 63). From the autumn of 1923 up to the spring of 1924, Morgenthau attended the classes taught by Hermann Oncken, an expert on nineteenth-century German history, a scholar 'of unusual sensitivity', who 'entered into an historic period or personality and reconstructed it, laying bare the hidden connections of motivations, actions, and consequences' (Morgenthau 1978, p. 64). According to Frei (2001), Oncken instilled in Morgenthau ideas which are easily recognisable in the latter's future writings: for Morgenthau, as it was for Oncken, politics represents a realm of life which is autonomous, yet thoroughly of this world, a realm with its own laws, for whose mastering higher faculties are needed, since politics is also an art (Frei 2001, pp. 120-1). An important thing to be mentioned here is that Morgenthau attended Oncken's lectures on Bismarck's foreign policy, and also those which focused on the principles of foreign and military policy, and the relationship between them. The latter area of study, in particular, made a profound impression on Morgenthau – as he explained shortly before his death, 'for the first time, I felt the impact of a coherent system of thought, primarily a distillation of Bismarck's *Realpolitik*, that appeared to support my isolated and impressionistic judgments on contemporary issues of foreign policy' (Morgenthau 1978, p. 64).

Another professor dear to the young student was Karl Rothenbucher, a former friend of Weber who, in the summer of 1925, organised a seminar on Weber's political and social philosophy, which focused on Weber's political writings. Years later, Morgenthau would emphasise that 'it was a most fortunate coincidence for me that the intellectual and moral stature of Rothenbucher was commensurate with the subject matter of the seminar', and that this was 'a great experience, on account of the subject matter as well as the teacher' (Morgenthau 1978, p. 64).

Morgenthau went through another formative experience, ‘both intellectual and personal’, when he attended a seminar on international law organised by Professor Karl Neumeyer. It is to Neumeyer that Morgenthau owed a foundational education in this field, which, over the years, did him ‘an enormous amount of good’ (Morgenthau quoted in Thompson and Myers 1984, p. 348). Following the encounter with Neumeyer’s rigorous, line by line analysis of international law core texts, Morgenthau learnt ‘to take nothing for granted in the so-called scholarly literature’ – as he put it in his intellectual autobiography, ‘whenever later on I came across outrageous statements that I hesitated to expose for what they were, I remembered Neumeyer’s seminar and took heart’ (Morgenthau 1978, p. 65). Years later, in writing Neumeyer’s obituary for the *American Journal of International Law*, Morgenthau would use touching words to praise his former teacher, portraying Neumeyer as a scholar with a ‘pious and noble soul’, who was endowed with intellectual honesty and with ‘a genuinely ethical aspiration to truth for truth’s sake’ (Morgenthau 1941, p. 672).

Another very important intellectual encounter was that between Morgenthau and Hugo Sinzheimer, a specialist in labour and criminal law who ran his own firm, and who also acted as a professor at the University of Frankfurt. Morgenthau met Sinzheimer in 1928, when he began a legal internship under the latter’s supervision. During the internship, he provided Sinzheimer with general research assistance and worked at the drafting of briefs for the Supreme Court, but he also had teaching assistant duties at the university, and often accompanied, and even represented, his boss in criminal cases (see Frei 2001, p. 36. For an account of Morgenthau’s activity during that period, see also Morgenthau 1978 and Thompson and Myers 1984). As one of the drafters of the 1919 Weimar Constitution, Sinzheimer had an outstanding



reputation, being, in Morgenthau's assessment, 'one of the greatest criminal lawyers, and one of the two or three foremost labour lawyers in Germany' (Morgenthau quoted in Thompson and Myers 1984, p. 348). In a letter sent in January 1934 to his supervisor and friend, Morgenthau wrote that he was grateful for having breathed 'the intellectual and moral air' that Sinzheimer emanated, and concluded: 'Giving up the ties that such an influence creates would mean giving up my own personality' (Morgenthau quoted in Frei 2001, p. 168).

In his research of Morgenthau's diaries and private correspondence, Frei has examined the letters written to, and received from, Sinzheimer. Frei argues that the humanist ethics defended by Morgenthau's law internship supervisor exerted a powerful attraction on the moralist in Morgenthau (Frei 2001, p. 170). Frei claims that, due to Sinzheimer's influence, Morgenthau 'came to embrace classical humanist values – and he retained his convictions up until the end of his life' (Frei 2001, p. 170). According to Frei, along with the life experience accumulated in native Germany, Sinzheimer's influence is one of the two crucial factors which have in the end made Morgenthau embrace 'not only a humanist but also a decidedly liberal outlook' (Frei 2001, p. 170), that emphasised the desirability of universal values, capable to satisfy modern man's need for security and certainty.

Thanks to his knowing of Sinzheimer, Morgenthau met scholars such as Franz Neumann (a future US immigrant himself, who at that time acted as Sinzheimer's assistant), Paul Tillich, Martin Buber, Carl Mennicke, Hendrik de Man and Friedrich Giese (see Frei 2001, p. 38). Moreover, Morgenthau also contacted the proponents of Marxism, grouped around the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, and psychoanalysts such as Erich Fromm and Karl Landauer (see Frei 2001, p. 126). The close relations between German inter-war Marxists and psychoanalysts are detailed

in Jay 1973). Most importantly, around that time, while meeting the above scholars, Morgenthau also began to affirm his own critical voice. Morgenthau articulated a series of critical positions whose outline will help readers to understand his main theoretical commitments better. The targets of Morgenthau's criticism are outlined below.

'I could not abide that particular type of Marxist who considers Marxism to be a closed intellectual system, containing ready-made answers to all possible questions, to be elicited by correct interpretations' (Morgenthau 1978, p. 67) – from this account, one grasps the reasons behind Morgenthau's rejection of Marxism. Morgenthau criticised the Marxists for their reductionism. As he maintains in an unpublished lecture, 'whereas there are of course economic elements determining foreign policies, I think it is one of the greatest mistakes, and a very primitive explanation of foreign policy, to try to reduce foreign policy to a mere reflection of economic conflicts and economic interests' (Morgenthau Papers, 14 January 1946, Box 169, p. 4). Moreover, soon after familiarising himself with the scholars at the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, Morgenthau was 'repelled' by the contrast between the political situation in Germany, and the 'futile hair-splitting' in which many of the Institute's members were engaged: as Morgenthau put it in his 'Intellectual Autobiography', 'the Nazi enemy was standing at the gate, aided and abetted from within, and these intelligent and learned people... found nothing better to do than search for the true meaning of one statement by Marx as against another' (Morgenthau 1978, p. 67). As Morgenthau concluded in his 1978 article, since his encounter with Marxists, 'the aversion to a dogmatism that sacrifices pragmatic effectiveness for logical or ideological consistency, has remained a persistent element of my intellectual attitude' (Morgenthau 1978, p. 67).

Morgenthau's encounter with psychoanalysis did not fare any better. In 1929, soon after finishing the preparations for the publication of his doctoral thesis, he started to think about developing a political theory that would provide 'a general foundation' for the specific relationship between politics and law, which he had written about in his doctoral thesis (Morgenthau 1978, p. 67). Psychoanalysis was much discussed in Germany at that time, and Morgenthau hoped that Freud's insights might be able to provide him with such a foundation for his theory. For about a year, Morgenthau experimented with Freudian concepts and ideas, in an attempt 'to construct a theoretical system of politics' (Morgenthau 1978, p. 67). However, he then realised that his experiments had been a failure (for an argument which highlights Freud's importance for Morgenthau's perspective, see Schuett 2007). Years later, he would criticise both psychoanalysis and Marxism for their reductionism. As Morgenthau would state in his 1978 article, 'what defeats a psychoanalytical theory of politics is what has defeated a Marxist theory of politics: the impossibility for accounting for the complexities and varieties of political experience with the simplicities of a reductionist theory, economic or psychological' (Morgenthau 1978, p. 67).

Moreover, the conservative revolutionaries' ideas - their activist philosophy, their critique of rationalism, their glorification of war and support for strong leadership (see Phelan 1985 and Woods 1996) - were received by Morgenthau with mixed feelings. Morgenthau was in accord with the conservative revolutionaries' assumptions regarding the consequences of technology, and the need for strong leadership in Germany; yet, unlike them, the emphasis on war and on conflict for conflict's sake looked horrific to Morgenthau. Relevant to the present thesis is the fact that, in contrast to Ernst Junger in particular, Morgenthau argued in favour of

‘morally relevant values’, and he maintained that ‘man’ has ‘a higher, spiritual vocation, to which instinctual drives must be subordinated’, that ‘man’ keeps striving ‘to direct instincts toward objective, morally relevant goals’ (Morgenthau quoted in Frei 2001, pp. 164-5). In an unpublished article written in Germany, Morgenthau criticised Junger for his view on war as ‘a goal in itself’, for glorifying war as a ‘splendid emotional release’ which turned men into ‘magnificent beasts of prey’ (Morgenthau quoted in Frei 2001, p. 164). This, Morgenthau argued, was an attitude which viewed ‘the unleashing of instincts as the ultimate goal, and the enjoyment of emotional outbursts as the ultimate value’, and which demonstrated Junger’s dangerous ‘lack of restraint, his barbarism, his egotistic hedonism, his hostility toward culture and society’ (Morgenthau quoted in Frei 2001, p. 164). In that manuscript, Morgenthau acknowledged the existence of human drives which sought release. War however, he concluded, was only one possible consequence of these drives, and by no means a necessary one (Morgenthau quoted in Frei 2001, p. 165).

In inter-war Germany, Morgenthau did not reject only Marxism, psychoanalysis and some of the conservative revolutionaries’ ideas, but also Carl Schmitt. Morgenthau met Schmitt once, in Berlin, and this meeting was an immense disappointment to him: as he would later put it, the encounter lacked ‘anything even approaching spontaneity’, it was ‘staged in every detail’, a cold, contrived and dishonest ‘charade’, ‘worthwhile only in revealing in capsule form the character of that brilliant, inventive scholar’ (Morgenthau 1978, p. 68). According to Morgenthau, after their meeting, Schmitt apparently incorporated some of Morgenthau’s ideas (to be found in his doctoral dissertation) into the second edition of the *Concept of the Political*, without consulting him and without mentioning their source (Morgenthau 1978, p. 68).

This time, the motives behind Morgenthau's critique were not only theoretical, but also moral. While praising Schmitt for his immense, intellectually well-deserved prestige (Morgenthau 1978, p. 68), Morgenthau attacked him for his lack of theoretical constancy, for his passing from neo-Kantianism to Catholic political philosophy, and then to liberal democracy, authoritarianism and Nazism (Morgenthau 1978, p. 67). Morgenthau also despised Schmitt for what he considered the latter's unprincipled scholarly behaviour. He criticised Schmitt for his argumentation in favour of Hitler's blood purge of 1934, and for his making up of stories regarding Friedrich Julius Stahl, the founder of the Prussian Conservative Party (see Morgenthau 1978, p. 68). In Morgenthau's view, 'no German political thinker of the interwar period was more amply endowed with intellectual ability, but it is doubtful whether any surpassed him in lack of principle and servility to his Nazi masters' (Morgenthau 1978, p. 67).

Last but not least, between 1932 and 1934, Morgenthau developed a critique of another major strand of thought in inter-war Germany: Neo-Kantianism. To Hans Kelsen's 'pure' theory of law, Morgenthau opposed what he called 'the reality of norms' (the title of his *Habilitation* thesis, published in 1934). Morgenthau sought to weaken the distinction between the *ought to be* and the *is*, central to (neo-)Kantian philosophy. As Frei explains, in Morgenthau's interpretation, the ought to be need no longer be envisaged as a purely aprioristic category independent of experience, but one 'in relation to an empirically ascertainable reality' (Frei 2001, p. 135). Consequently, Morgenthau criticised the neo-Kantians for placing the normative realms 'between heaven and earth... in these Elysian fields', and he argued in favour of bringing the norms back to 'earthly' reality, in an attempt to construct 'an empirical theory of a ideal phenomenon' (Frei 2001, p. 135). For Morgenthau, the

reality of norms was ‘either psychic or physical’, the ‘psychic reality’ of a norm being founded on its ‘capacity to influence the will of the person it addresses in the direction desired by the norm’ (Frei 2001, p. 135). Within his *Habilitation* thesis, Morgenthau criticised Kelsen for his withdrawal from ‘reality’, and for his refusal to acknowledge the existence of burning political problems (Frei 2001, p. 135). Morgenthau suggested that it was ‘mistaken, dangerous, and ultimately impossible to banish value judgments completely from the social sciences in order to keep them “pure”’ (Frei 2001, p. 151). Thus, to Morgenthau, norms had to be grounded in the ‘reality’ of life and politics. As we will see in the next chapters, this was a position which he maintained throughout his life.

To sum up, while in Germany, Morgenthau met and admired teachers such as Oncken, Rothenbucher, Neumeyer and Sinzheimer. Moreover, he was not only a passive receiver of knowledge, on the contrary. He was an interpreter and a critic, and his criticism helps one to grasp Morgenthau’s positions on some of the major topics of discussion in those times. Most importantly, the present thesis argues that there were two thinkers with whose views Morgenthau felt like being broadly in accord: Friedrich Nietzsche and Max Weber. Their ideas encompassed valuable assumptions, many of which were in harmony with Morgenthau’s views regarding the death of universal values, the loss of meaning and the disenchantment of the world.

How did Morgenthau go about acknowledging Nietzsche’s and Weber’s importance in the articulation of his thought, and which of Nietzsche’s and Weber’s ideas did he share and incorporate into his theory, and which ones did he reject? The following section intends to answer these questions.

## **2.3 Morgenthau's Reading of Nietzsche and Weber**

### **2.3.1 Friedrich Nietzsche**

A feature which makes Frei's intellectual biography unique and valuable is that it uncovers a relationship which Morgenthau has hardly ever talked or written about openly: between his thought and Nietzsche's. Taking into account the generally hostile attitude developed against the Germans around the Second World War, and Nazis' misuse of Nietzsche in particular, the acknowledgment of such a relationship may not have looked 'intellectually safe' to Morgenthau, even years after 1945. As for Frei, he is convinced that these must have been Morgenthau's calculations upon entering the United States, in 1937: by the time he arrived in his adoptive country, many of his contemporaries 'made no distinction between Nazis and Germans', and it would have been 'very imprudent, if not outright self-defeating for Morgenthau to have presented his views as a "German" theory of politics, or to have stressed the "German" origins of his ideas' (Frei 2001, p. 110). Frei adds further that as a German Jewish immigrant, Morgenthau was 'hardly alone' in trying to conceal the German influences in his academic work (see Frei 2001, pp. 110, 112).

Frei performed an extensive reading of Morgenthau's diaries and private correspondence, especially of those which were written in Germany, and he discovered that Morgenthau considered Nietzsche no less than the 'god' of his youth

(Frei 2001, p. 98). Moreover, once, when writing to a friend, he put it plainly: 'A most powerful and probably decisive influence has certainly been Nietzsche' (Frei 2001, p. 113). In light of the illuminating evidence available to him, Frei concluded that, in Morgenthau's case, the reading of Nietzsche represented a crucial formative experience, which obviously 'touched upon the very roots' of Morgenthau's thinking (Frei 2001, p. 108). Nietzsche confirmed and articulated Morgenthau's own experiences (Frei 2001, p. 100), the convergence of the latter's personal experiences with the former's perspective and diagnostic method of inquiry leading to the creation of an 'affinity of outlook' between the two (Frei 2001, pp. 107-8). In Frei's interpretation, the fact that to Morgenthau, Nietzsche clearly stood above all the other authors he read throughout his academic studies (for Morgenthau's 'reading list' around that time see Frei 2001, p. 108) should not be underestimated, but given its proper place, and its significance recognised. The findings arrived at in this thesis are in their turn based on an in depth reading of Morgenthau's manuscripts held by the US Library of Congress, as well as of all his published works and an extensive secondary literature, and they highlight the Nietzschean aspects of Morgenthau's thought. However, as later chapters will demonstrate, the account provided here differs from Frei's in its more detailed analysis of the Nietzschean and Weberian aspects of Morgenthau's theory - especially of his concern with meaning, power as meaning imposition and disenchantment - and in the emphasis on Morgenthau's originality and relevance to the discussion of modernity and postmodernity in International Relations.

Morgenthau first read Nietzsche in high school but Nietzsche did not make an impact on him at that time. His second, decisive encounter with Nietzsche occurred in early 1926. While passing through *The Untimely Meditations*, as a law student in



Munich, Morgenthau 'caught fire' (Frei 2001, p. 99). It took him more than three years to work through the complete writings, and the systematic reading was followed by a written confession: Nietzsche, 'the harbinger of a new Renaissance, much like the *Quattrocento*, strong, clear, without morality', became the 'god' of Morgenthau's youth (Morgenthau quoted in Frei 2001, pp. 98, 147). Taking into account the sophistication and finesse of the insights he had arrived at, to Morgenthau Nietzsche 'towered' above all other philosophers, and he was one of the 'greatest Germans' (Morgenthau quoted in Frei 2001, pp. 110, 113). Morgenthau's relationship with Nietzsche's thought witnessed both ups and downs, Morgenthau praised, but at times also criticised his mentor (see Frei 2001, pp. 105-6). Yet, Nietzsche was never abandoned, and he remained 'an important source of confirmation' up until Morgenthau's final years (Frei 2001, p. 94). This thesis will go beyond Frei's account in order to demonstrate Nietzsche's and Weber's impact on Morgenthau as manifested in his discussion of meaning and disenchantment in particular, with a variety of examples from Morgenthau's both published and unpublished works. The study of Nietzsche's and Weber's impact on Morgenthau will also help us to understand why it is important to return to Morgenthau at present, with a view to the discussions of the topic of modernity and postmodernity, on the concepts of meaning and values, and the legitimacy of truth. The points of convergence between Nietzsche's, Weber's and Morgenthau's thinking will be hinted at below, and explored at length in the next chapters.

One of the outcomes of Morgenthau's reading of Nietzsche is his engagement with the Nietzschean diagnosis regarding modernity after the 'death of God' - interpreted by Morgenthau as the 'death' (disintegration) of an international morality 'composed of Christian, cosmopolitan, and humanitarian elements' (Morgenthau

1949, p. 191). As Nietzsche once put it, 'one interpretation has collapsed; but because it was considered *the* interpretation, it now seems as if there were no meaning at all in existence, as if everything were in vain' (Nietzsche 1968, p. 35). As a consequence of this collapse, 'the highest values devalue themselves' (Nietzsche 1968, p. 9), and nihilism occurs. In light of his own beliefs, crystallised at an early stage of his career (also due to his encounter with Nietzsche), Morgenthau interprets modernity, as Frei points out, as a time with 'no firmly established concepts of good and evil' (Frei 2001, p. 147), with a plurality of conflicting meanings. The issue of meaning and what its loss entails preoccupies Morgenthau, who agrees with the 'death of God' diagnosis, and is aware of the exceptional character of the situation. For Morgenthau, a strong, singular meaning of the world is absent, and the days when timeless values were accepted without question are gone forever (see Frei 2001, p. 147). At first, like everybody else, Morgenthau strives for security and certainty (Frei 2001, p. 102). He then realises that, in a present stigmatised by the 'death of God', the only feelings that he can experience are insecurity, and an uncertainty entailing 'terrible suffering for the mind' (Frei 2001, p. 102). As Morgenthau puts it in *Scientific Man Vs Power Politics*, in such times, although man 'cannot live without a philosophy which gives meaning to his existence' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 14), he discovers 'many little answers, but no answer to the great questions of his life, no meaning, no direction' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 176). Like the nationalistic masses which Morgenthau criticises for their destructive actions, men 'meet under an empty sky from which the gods have departed' (Morgenthau 1949, p. 196. An extended analysis of Morgenthau's views on this issue will be made in chapter 3).

Nevertheless, like Nietzsche, Morgenthau is not only aware of the dangers, but also of the possibilities opened up by the death of God, and he welcomes what David Owen has called 'the critical interrogation of our values that this 'death of God' makes possible' (Owen 1999, p. 11). Thus, after emphasising that men live in the aftermath of 'God's death', in a world lacking a 'guiding light', a source of universally accepted principles, Morgenthau argues that those who value certainty should now be looked at with doubt. As we will see in future chapters in detail, Morgenthau starts from the Nietzschean position of 'God's death', and he also agrees with Nietzsche on one of the consequences of this 'death': human beings now have increased scope for the creative manifestation of their agency. The act of meaning imposition points to the creative potentialities embedded in the power struggle, and constitutes a positive interpretation of human capabilities.

A remark deserves special emphasis at this point: as Morgenthau's critique of Junger and Schmitt demonstrates, his endorsement of Nietzsche's diagnosis of the 'death of God' does not mean that he succumbs to a relativism which denies the existence of any transcendental source of values whatsoever. On the contrary, the dangers implied by the continuous erosion of morality will preoccupy Morgenthau throughout his life. According to the present interpretation, Morgenthau gains from Nietzsche an awareness of a certain kind of relativism, one which takes into account historical and cultural variations (see Morgenthau 1979). Nevertheless, Morgenthau still rates Judeo-Christian and Kantian moral values highly. Furthermore, he regards the consolidation of a universal realm of values favourably (the implications of this very important position will be analysed in the thesis later on).

According to the present interpretation, another theme in whose articulation Morgenthau is in accord with Nietzsche is that of life as a struggle, perpetuated by a

human individual caught between the opposing forces which constitute his nature. Morgenthau reminds us in *Scientific Man vs Power Politics* that in the aftermath of the death of God, 'whatever man does or intends to do emanates from himself and refers again to himself' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 163). Sharing with Nietzsche this interest in 'man', Morgenthau seems to ask, at his turn: 'What can we know about the human?' As Morgenthau acknowledges in an interview taken in 1964, his basic motivation has always been 'to get at the truth about human nature and human action': 'that I addressed myself to the truth about politics was in a sense an accident' ('Sum and Substance' interview, Morgenthau Papers, Box 172, p. 1).

While rejecting the uni-dimensional, 'reason-based', portrait of human nature, Morgenthau wonders 'whether reason could possibly prevail over the other "forces"', taking into account man's natural inclinations (Morgenthau quoted in Frei 2001, p. 106). Along these forces, he singles out the lust for power, whose outstanding dominance over 'man' makes life a perpetual struggle. Thus, in Morgenthau's interpretation, similar to Nietzsche's, life is not 'only' struggle: it is struggle for power. What determines your rank 'is the quantum of power you are' (Nietzsche 1968, p. 330), and individuals' awareness of this fact intensifies their appetite for such a form of domination. In Morgenthau's account, which echoes Nietzsche's views, there is no human action 'which would not contain at least a trace of this desire' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 166). Society is created by 'elemental bio-psychological drives', 'the drives to live, to propagate, and to dominate', common to all men (Morgenthau 1949, p. 17). Taking all these into account, Morgenthau writes in *Scientific Man vs Power Politics* that to deny the lust for power would mean to deny 'the very condition of human existence in this world' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 172).

Morgenthau's view on what power means is Nietzschean too. For Morgenthau, 'power' represents 'man's control over the minds and actions of other men' (Morgenthau 1949, p. 73). We notice that one's power needs others' presence and recognition, that 'power' is clearly linked to the issue of social interactions. More important, in order for someone to have 'power', therefore 'to make one's own person prevail against others' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 166), (s)he must exert control over the minds. Such a form of control, manifesting itself as one's 'rule' over others' interpretations of events, points to man's creative potential. Moreover, the above-mentioned control refers to one's act of imposing a certain 'version', a certain interpretation, upon the others – as a meaning imposition. The issue of meaning is central to Morgenthau, and in his view, man's power resides in the successful imposition of interpretations. The human creative capacities are thus channelled into a continuous effort, performed by each human being, for imposing 'his' meaning, his particular positions, not by virtue of physical force, but of 'the force of the mind'. This assumption regarding the centrality of a Nietzschean approach to power in Morgenthau's theory, which focuses on creation as interpretation, and on struggling for meaning imposition, will be substantiated in the next chapters.

'Who of you will renounce power, knowing and experiencing that power is evil?', Nietzsche once rhetorically asked his readers (quoted in Kaufmann 1974, p. 180). Mirroring this other Nietzschean position, Morgenthau tackles the issue of the power's 'demon' (Kaufmann 1974, p. 197), what it makes men do, and how they gain this power. Time and again, Morgenthau points to the limitless character of humans' lust for/will to power: while man's vital needs 'are capable of satisfaction', the lust for power 'would be satisfied only if the last man became an object of his domination, there being nobody above or beside him' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 172). As

Morgenthau asserts further, 'the selfishness of man has limits; his will to power has none' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 166). It is in this context that Morgenthau points to the omnipresence of 'the tragic'. What he calls the 'tragic meaning' of existence, and also its 'irrationality' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 174), stem from man's nature itself, from its characteristics - more precisely, from the limitations demonstrated in dealing with a lust for power which all so easily generates destruction.

However, it is worth emphasising that in Nietzsche's and Morgenthau's interpretation, man's nature is viewed dichotomously, and in man we find both 'creature' and 'creator'. In Morgenthau's account, humans' desire for power carries within it, on the one hand, a highly destructive potential. On the other hand however, like in Nietzsche - for whom the *Übermensch*, an 'annihilator' who breaks values (Nietzsche 1954, p. 228), turns into a creator, his act of destruction being, in the end, positively assessed – in Morgenthau's portrait of human nature we can perceive a second, positive facet. It is a facet symbolised by the possibility of overcoming through mastering and creation. Man, perceived as a creature governed by antagonistic forces, is also a source of creation, causing positive changes by means of his longing for transcendence. As it will become obvious in chapters 4 and 5, for Morgenthau, man's essence comprises a dynamic relation destruction – construction. Morgenthau suggests that, in order to succeed in 'taming' his destructive capabilities, men living in the aftermath of the 'death of God' should engage in an exercise in self-knowledge, in obtaining insights about their human condition, in understanding it as well as possible. Here, what is interesting is that this stance seems to mirror some of Nietzsche's own assertions. As Ruth Abbey reveals, during his 'middle period', Nietzsche envisages 'a conception of self-knowledge as a continuous quest to understand a protean, multiple, mysterious self', and 'those who do not engage in

careful self-observation misunderstand their passions and are unable to master them' (see Abbey 2000, p. 22).

To overcome, to go beyond the limits of the 'customary', of ordinary experiences, to strive for fulfilling constructive endeavours, to aspire to better and greater - these are the other insights gained by young Morgenthau, during his Nietzschean reading experience. As chapter 5 will shown at length, Morgenthau's superior hero grapples with ethical issues, animated by a desire to know more about his nature, and to be able to 'tame' it. He has 'a special moral responsibility to act', 'in accordance with the rules of the political art' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 159), and his successful actions make politics look like the 'art of the possible' (Weber 1948, p. 124). We can see that Morgenthau's 'best' characters, interpreted as wise personalities, who alone 'should be in command' (Frei 2001, p. 157), are thought of by Morgenthau in a way similar to that in which Nietzsche regarded his superior heroes, yet they have also undergone a political recasting. Re-shaping Morgenthau's Nietzschean outlook, this process of political recasting was performed with the help of a scholar whose works young Morgenthau read around the same time as Nietzsche's. His name is Max Weber.

### **2.3.2 Max Weber**

Morgenthau started to read Weber in the summer of 1925, during his attendance at the University of Munich of a series of seminars organised by Karl Rothenbucher, a professor of constitutional law. Morgenthau's diaries do not speak about the impression Weber's thought made on him. Instead, we find occasional references in his letters (see Frei 2001, p. 130, footnote 65), and two 'official accounts', in his interview with Bernard Johnson (Thompson and Myers 1984, pp. 333-86), and in the 'intellectual autobiography' published in 1978 (Morgenthau 1978, reprinted in Thompson and Myers 1984, pp. 1-17). Professor Rothenbucher had a major contribution in generating, and then cultivating, Morgenthau's admiration for Weber: a 'great man, very intelligent, of great character and civic courage' (Morgenthau quoted in Thompson and Myers 1984, p. 348), Rothenbucher 'understood Weber's mind and made it understood' (Morgenthau 1978, p. 64). Consequently, the encounter with Weber's political thought, as mediated by Rothenbucher, was rated highly by Morgenthau: it stood as 'one of the formative experiences' of his intellectual life (Morgenthau quoted in Thompson and Myers 1984, p. 347), and Rothenbucher's Weber had 'a reassuring influence' on him (Morgenthau 1978, p. 64). According to Morgenthau's detailed account of the reasons behind his admiration, Weber's political thought 'possessed all the intellectual and moral



qualities I had looked for in vain in the contemporary literature inside and outside the universities' (Morgenthau 1978, p. 64). As a scholar, Weber was dear to Morgenthau because he was 'everything most of his colleagues pretended to be but were not' – he was thus true to himself, and to the others. According to Morgenthau, while, as a citizen, Weber was 'a passionate observer of the political scene and a frustrated participant in it', as a scholar, he 'looked at politics without passion and pursued no political purpose beyond the intellectual one of understanding' (Morgenthau 1978, p. 64).

As Weber once famously put it, 'we now dwell in a world that has been intellectually shaped to a large extent by Marx and Nietzsche', and 'anyone who fails to acknowledge that he could not have accomplished a significant part of his own work without the contributions of these two men is deceiving himself and others' (Weber quoted in Frei 2001, p. 108). The introduction to this chapter mentioned that various works which document Nietzsche's influence on Weber, and the subsequent similarities between Nietzsche's and Weber's positions, have already been published (see Hennis 1988, esp. pp. 146-62; Owen 1991, 1994; Warren 1992; Szakolczai 1998). In Weber's works, young Morgenthau encountered some themes which must have looked very familiar to him, since he had already found them in Nietzsche. Most importantly, this thesis maintains that it is by means of recasting Nietzschean themes in institutional terms, 'lending them a public and political import' 'found wanting' (Horowitz and Maley 1994, p. 9), that Weber gained particular importance to Morgenthau. What Nietzsche expressed in philosophical terms, Weber 'translated' in political terms, and made it relevant to politics. In the interpretation put forward in the thesis, this 'politicised Nietzschean' facet of Weber was the most appealing to Morgenthau. In support of this assumption stands the fact that, when asked to

assemble a list of those ten books which 'shaped his life', Morgenthau mentioned *The Political Writings of Max Weber* (see Frei 2001, p. 113). This represents an indication that to Morgenthau, Weber was important precisely for his political insights, with all their Nietzschean overtones. Moreover, the thesis argues that to Morgenthau, Weber's economic writings were secondary at best, and consequently it does not see 'Weber the economist' in Morgenthau.

As various scholars have indicated (see for example Lassman 2000, esp. p. 83), the struggle for power and its inescapability represent a central theme in Weber's social and political thought. Life as a generalised struggle, and politics as a struggle for power par excellence – these are the main images of Weber's dynamic account on the topic. For Weber, the idea of a world free from the rule of man over man is simply utopian. Moreover, politics means, above all, struggle for power - in Weber's words, 'anyone who goes in for worldly politics must... be free of illusions and acknowledge one fundamental fact: to be resigned to the inevitable and eternal struggle of man with man on this earth' (Weber quoted in Lassman 2000, p. 84). The meaning of 'power' in this context Weber interprets as 'every chance of imposing one's own will within a social relation, even against resistance, regardless of what this chance is based upon' (Weber quoted in Lassman 2000, p. 89). In a well-known formulation, Weber asserts that anyone engaged in politics is striving for power, either power as a means to attain other goals, or power 'for its own sake', 'which is to say, in order to enjoy the feeling of prestige given by power' (Weber quoted in Lassman, p. 85. According to Frei, almost identical formulations can also be found in Nietzsche. See Frei 2001, p. 130).

For Morgenthau then, life is a struggle, and politics is a struggle for power par excellence. Morgenthau argues that the distinctiveness between domestic and

international politics is 'one of degree and not of kind' (Morgenthau 1949, p. 14). In both cases, the lust for power is 'the very essence of the intention, the very life-blood of the action' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 167): we encounter a generalised struggle of tremendous dynamics and proportions. In Morgenthau's definition, political power consists in 'the psychological relations between two minds', giving to those who exercise it 'control over certain actions of those over whom it is exercised' (Morgenthau 1949, p. 14). This definition echoes Weber's definition, and, as suggested above, also Nietzsche's account. Moreover, Morgenthau also borrows from Weber the well-known classification according to which political phenomena can be reduced to one of three basic types: 'to keep power, to increase power, or to demonstrate power', with their typical policies of the status quo, imperialism, and prestige (see Morgenthau 1949, p. 52). Here it is important to point that, when asked about the origins of this typology, Morgenthau did mention Weber's name. He wrote: 'I would hazard the guess that I was most strongly influenced by Max Weber' (Morgenthau quoted in Frei 2001, p. 130).

The disenchantment of the modern world constitutes another important topic in Morgenthau's account. He adopts the Nietzschean-Weberian diagnosis of the times - comprising the 'death of God' and the advent of nihilism and disenchantment - and applies it to his particular area of interest, trying to raise his contemporaries' awareness on these developments. As the first scholar drawing 'the most radical scientific conclusions from Nietzsche's diagnosis of nihilism' (Hennis 1988, pp. 158-9), Weber points to the phenomenon of disenchantment as to no less than 'the fate of our times' (Weber 1948, p. 155). Modern men live in an era when 'the ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from public life either into the transcendental realm of mystic life or into the brotherliness of direct and personal human relations'

(Weber 1948, p. 155). To Weber, we live in a world plagued by an ‘unceasing struggle of... gods with one another’ (Weber 1948, p. 152), in which ‘the reality of rule and the struggle for power’ will be given direction and substance ‘by the inevitable struggle of irreconcilable values’ (Lassman 2000, p. 86). The characteristics of the modern world, as spelled out by Weber, echo Morgenthau’s own assumptions, and amplify his eagerness to understand the inner mechanisms of a struggle over meaning imposition, which takes place within a disenchanted life. In such a world, marked by scientific enterprises brought to the extreme, ‘one need no longer have recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits’: technical calculations ‘perform this service’ (Weber 1948, p. 139). In the next chapters it will be shown that Morgenthau is particularly concerned with the topic of what this thesis has called ‘the disenchantment of politics’, as exacerbated by scientific enterprises. According to Morgenthau, the attempt to reform by means of rationalisation, to simplify an extremely complex reality, has made the burden of life ‘harder to bear’ (Morgenthau 1947, p. 110).

However, nowhere is Weber’s impact more obvious than in Morgenthau’s emphasis on the moral facet of the political act. This brings us back to the issue of ‘man’, focused upon by all three thinkers analysed in this thesis. Both Nietzsche and Weber interrogate modernity from a perspective defined by the concept of the individual (see Owen 1991, esp. p. 82). Morgenthau approaches this theme in a similar fashion, and moreover, as seen above, an important part of his reading of Nietzsche regards man’s creative, interpretative potential. Weber also places a considerable emphasis on the creative, self-affirming opportunities provided by modernity, and on the role of great personalities in particular. Morgenthau is mainly interested in the political embodiment of such great personalities. Consequently, he

borrowed from Weber a particularly political perspective on the Nietzschean-Weberian leadership problematique: the individual statesman who embraces politics as a vocation and is the prototype of responsibility in the field of international politics.

Nietzsche develops the issue of responsibility in his work *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1996). In Nietzsche's view, a responsible man has to 'think in terms of causality, to see and anticipate from afar, to posit ends and means with certainty, to be able... to reckon and calculate' (Nietzsche 1996, p. 40). Nietzsche's position on responsibility was later 'politicised' by Weber (see Horowitz and Maley 1994, esp. pp. 68-96). In Weber's formulation, a person who acts in accordance to the ethics of responsibility has to give an account of the foreseeable results of his actions (see Weber 1948, p. 120). In the interpretation put forward in this thesis, Morgenthau picks up and continues his mentors' project in this regard, especially within its Weberian, political formulation. Morgenthau engages with the issue of responsibility, and his superior political actor impresses by means of his wisdom, moral strength, calmness and 'pathos of distance'.

To Morgenthau, the responsible statesman, caught between his inner poles of lust for power and morality, stands as 'the common lot of mankind', and he thus represents 'the prototype of social man himself' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 188). Because he grasps and then overcomes his nature's evils, and due to his awareness of the moral facet of the political act, he nevertheless is a symbol of humanity's superior embodiment. The statesman represents a living proof of human nature's constructive force, and he 'creates a new society out of his knowledge of the nature of man' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 189). He thus has the gift of recognizing 'in the contingencies of the social world the concretisations of eternal laws' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 187) -

the already mentioned laws which animate human nature. The responsible statesman has a crucial role in 'domesticating' the all encompassing fight over power, 'the enduring presence of evil' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 172) in political action. The 'evil of power' cannot be avoided, Morgenthau asserts, therefore what remains to be done is to 'model' it - as Morgenthau quotes from Goethe, 'to accept the evils..., and then seek to counterbalance them' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 185).

According to Morgenthau, all action affecting others, 'and hence political action par excellence' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 174), is subject to the ethics of responsibility. In Morgenthau's view, before the adoption of a decision, the statesman should first and foremost ask himself consequence-related questions, and, 'beyond the victory of tomorrow', his mind, 'complicated and subtle', must anticipate the 'possibilities of the future' (Morgenthau 1949, p. 443). As emphasised by Morgenthau, the one 'who thinks in legalistic and propagandistic terms is particularly tempted to insist upon the letter of the law... and to lose sight of the consequences which that insistence may have for its own nation and for humanity' (Morgenthau 1949, p. 441). Morgenthau raises his readers' awareness to the fact that the success in preserving international order depends upon the 'extraordinary moral and intellectual qualities which all the leading participants must possess'. Moreover, while quoting from Burke, Morgenthau warns that a statesman who does not rise to the high expectations implied by statecraft may 'ruin his country forever' by 'judging contrary to the exigencies of the moment' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 187). His mistake may, indeed, 'spell the difference between peace and war' (Morgenthau 1949, p. 445).

As Morgenthau tells us further, the social world 'yields only to that intricate combination of moral and material pressures which the art of the statesman creates and maintains' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 16). The importance and the subtlety of

matters belonging to statecraft, clearly make it depart from all bureaucratic, vocationless, 'rationalised' professions. In determining the goals of his country, in assessing those of others, in employing the adequate means suited to the pursuit of certain objectives, the statesman turns into an artisan, and his decisions are crucial not only for his country, but for humanity at large. Such responsible political actors, who correctly assess the distribution and relative strength of opposing forces, and who anticipate 'the emerging pattern of new constellations', are to Morgenthau 'the true realists', and they do justice to the nature of things (Morgenthau 1947, p. 174). In this interpretation, Morgenthau's statesman represents the goal humanity must long for, and he redeems the world, by giving it its meaning. Morgenthau's vision of leadership will be developed in chapter 5, which will examine these Weberian aspects of Morgenthau's thinking in more detail.

This chapter has so far pointed to Morgenthau's Nietzschean and Weberian reading experiences, which he went through as a student in native Germany. In what follows, it will provide an overview of Morgenthau's encounter with the American tradition, and of his contribution to post World War Two IR debates. Morgenthau's *Politics among Nations* had an extraordinary reception and a great impact on IR, and it consolidated Morgenthau's place in US academia and the dominance of realism in the field. While a proponent of Nietzschean and Weberian assumptions (mentioned earlier), Morgenthau also immersed himself in the US academic environment, and his thinking was marked by certain intellectual encounters and concrete historical events, which the next section will point to in more detail.

## **2.4 The American Experience**

Hans Morgenthau arrived in the United States in 1937, after it had become clear to him that his situation was hopeless. In a Europe shadowed by the prospect of a new war, he was an unemployed academic and a Jew threatened by the Nazis, leaving Frankfurt for Paris, then Geneva for Madrid. By contrast, the US looked more peaceful and also like a genuine land of opportunity - as Morgenthau would later put it, 'the complete hopelessness of a man in my position in Europe as opposed to opportunities in the United States is very impressive' (Morgenthau quoted in Thompson and Myers 1984, p. 364). As he would gratefully admit, 'there is no doubt in my mind that I would never have been able to establish myself as a scholar were it not for the opportunities offered to me by the United States' (Morgenthau quoted in Thompson and Myers 1984, p. 385). In the US, he had the chance to prove his academic potential, and while doing this he was also able to advance (Thompson and Myers 1984, p. 385).

In his own admission, from an intellectual perspective, Morgenthau was 'quite unprepared' for the US (Morgenthau quoted in Thompson and Myers 1984, p. 378). In Europe, he had read some of the works of the American pragmatist William James, but had found him 'rather flat, common-sensical, and not particularly interesting' (Morgenthau quoted in Thompson and Myers 1984, p. 378). Having been



brought up 'in a tradition entirely different', as soon as he familiarised himself with US academic environment, Morgenthau was 'taken aback by the optimism and pragmatism of the American intellectual tradition' (Morgenthau quoted in Thompson and Myers 1984, p. 379). To this optimism, as manifested in the field of International Politics, Morgenthau opposed a 'realist' approach, which emphasised the pervasive nature of the struggle for power, the primacy of the national interest, and the demanding tasks faced by responsible statecraft: as Frei puts it, 'against the root evil of an overly optimistic view of life, he posited the tragic as an ineluctable condition of human existence' (Frei 2001, p. 185). Unsurprisingly then, upon arriving at the University of Chicago, Morgenthau attracted a negative reception on the part of colleagues such as Charles E. Merriam, Harold Lasswell, David Easton, Leonard White and Gabriel Almond, who were supporters of the behaviourist movement, incipient during that period (Frei 2001, p. 190). In Fermi's assessment, at Chicago, Morgenthau 'contended with an intellectual atmosphere in political science that was hostile to philosophy' (Fermi 1968, p. 84). As Morgenthau points out himself in his interview with Bernard Johnson, 'very quickly there developed a certain tension between myself and the Merriam faction' (Morgenthau quoted in Thompson and Myers 1984, p. 379).

Morgenthau's first book published in the US, *Scientific Man vs Power Politics*, came by his own admission 'as a kind of a bomb into a peaceful environment and shocked people no end' (Morgenthau quoted in Frei 2001, p. 207). As Fermi explains, the book launched 'an original and forceful criticism of the social, political, and moral philosophy of modern Western thought and its consequences for political life' (Fermi 1968, p. 84). Within this discussion, Fermi points to the contextual factors, emphasising that Morgenthau's first book challenged the scientific approach

to politics prevalent in the United States since the publication in 1924 of *New Aspects of Politics* by Morgenthau's colleague Charles E. Merriam (Fermi 1968, p. 84). Fermi maintains that when Professor Leonard White – who was a supporter of Merriam and Morgenthau's chairman at the University of Chicago - read *Scientific Man*, he suggested 'that Morgenthau teach a course in administrative law to put him back on the right track' (Fermi 1968, p. 84).

Despite this cold reception on the part of his behaviouralist colleagues, Morgenthau persevered with his approach, eager to attain his goal and a 'supreme task', as his close collaborator Kenneth Thompson calls it: 'the understanding of the meaning of politics' (Thompson 1999, p. 19). As Thompson asserts further in his interpretation of Morgenthau's contribution to IR, Morgenthau 'was less defiant than determined in his mission or reordering thinking on international politics', and he 'undertook to bring order and meaning to a body of information that would otherwise have remained a collection of disparate and unrelated information' (Thompson 1999, pp. 21, 22).

While *Scientific Man vs Power Politics* was intended to analyze 'fundamental problems of understanding and existence', *Politics among Nations* was a general and comprehensive writing, whose distinctive features set it apart from Morgenthau's other works (Thompson 1999, p. 19). The impressive product of long years of study and reflection, *Politics among Nations* sought 'to propound, especially as elaborated in 1954 in the second edition, a realist theory of international politics', and it 'attempted to give the political scientist a focal point that would distinguish his inquiries from those of the economist, the lawyer, or the moral philosopher' (Thompson 1960, p. 35). Power and interest were put forth as the ordering concepts in international politics (Thompson 1960, p. 36), and the crucial importance of the

statesman's mission in dealing with the contingencies of an anarchical environment was emphasised by Morgenthau at length.

In Thompson's interpretation, Morgenthau was one of the scholars who helped to lay the foundation for international politics (Thompson 1960, pp. 32-3), and the publication of his first two books consolidated his prominence in IR theory, and stirred debates within the discipline. As two of Morgenthau's re-evaluators put it, these debates 'certainly' had 'some elements of a 'cultural clash' (Amstrup 1978, p. 173), and *Scientific Man vs Power Politics* in particular marked 'the beginning of the conflict between a European social scientist and the new country he had come to know' (Sollner 1987, pp. 163-4). By contrast to the American 'idealists', who optimistically pointed to the prospects for cooperation, Morgenthau emphasised the reality of international political competition. He continuously confronted what he called 'the American tradition' imbued with faith in reason and progress. In his characterization, this is a tradition which assumes 'that all problems are susceptible of a rational solution', and 'that if they seem to resist such a solution, if you only spend more energy, more time, more manpower, and more money on them, they are bound to be solved' (Morgenthau quoted in Thompson and Myers 1984, p. 379). For his part, as indicated in his interview with Bernard Johnson, Morgenthau tried to make his American colleagues aware of the tragic character of political and social problems, which 'escape a clear-cut solution, but which must be lived with and manipulated', and which 'cannot be exorcised by some technological, social, or political contrivance' (Morgenthau quoted in Thompson and Myers 1984, p. 379). Morgenthau was, in Stanley Hoffmann's words, 'a refugee from suicidal Europe with a missionary impulse to teach the new world power all the lessons it had been able to ignore until then, but could no longer afford to reject' (Hoffmann 1977, p. 44). He

‘wanted to be normative, but to root his norms in the realities of politics’ (Hoffmann 1977, p. 44). No wonder then that, following the publication of his first books, he started to be perceived as the ‘enemy number one’ of US liberal reformers (Thompson 1980, p. 2) – a characterization shared by many, which in the present interpretation did not do justice to the multi-faceted character of Morgenthau’s thought.

As Lebow is keen to point out in *The Tragic Vision of Politics*, Morgenthau’s intellectual growth did not stop with his early post-war books, but naturally continued throughout his career (Lebow 2003, p. 254). Lebow argues that by the time of the Vietnam War Morgenthau ‘had become disillusioned by American-style realism’, and had adopted ‘much of the agenda of his former idealist opponents’ (Lebow 2003, pp. 26-7). In Lebow’s view, by 1970 Morgenthau was ‘guardedly optimistic about the prospects for a far-reaching transformation of the international system’, and his commitment to some form of supranational authority ‘deepened in the 1970s’ (Lebow 2003, pp. 50, 245). Moreover, as Lebow argues further, during this period Morgenthau was much more optimistic about the prospects of avoiding nuclear war and restoring America’s purpose (Lebow 2003, p. 254). In Lebow’s assessment, Morgenthau’s optimism was ‘based on his renewed belief in the power of experience and reason to serve as engines for progress’, and it was ‘the result of his experiences in his adopted homeland’ (Lebow 2003, p. 254). The present thesis acknowledges the evolution of Morgenthau’s thought depicted by Lebow, which manifests itself in many of Morgenthau’s reflections on topics such as democracy, leadership and greatness, the latter as exhibited by Abraham Lincoln. Nevertheless, this reading intends to prove that certain themes – such as the death of God, the disenchantment of politics, and power as meaning imposition – are enduring in

Morgenthau's theory, and he continuously points to the perils nurtured by the above phenomena. The thesis will explore these elements and will demonstrate their continuity in Morgenthau's account.

Moreover, in the context of this discussion of the impact of the US environment on Morgenthau, we would like to emphasise that by focusing on Nietzsche and Weber, this thesis does not imply that other sources of inspiration – for instance those within the American academic environment, such as Reinhold Niebuhr – were not important to Morgenthau. The thesis is far from underestimating the significance of Morgenthau's encounter with Niebuhr, and it would like to point to Morgenthau's own acknowledgment made in an unpublished letter, according to which in addition to Nietzsche's 'most powerful and probably decisive influence', in later years, Aristotle, Saint Augustine and Niebuhr had been the most important (Letter to Samuel Magill, 5 January 1962, Morgenthau Papers, Box 39, p. 1). Nevertheless, the present reading would also like to point to the formative character of the Nietzschean and Weberian reading experiences, which far outweighs in significance Morgenthau's later encounter with Niebuhr. As Morgenthau mentioned once, in the context of private discussion and correspondence, 'Reinie and I come out about the same on politics', and Niebuhr's writings 'have confirmed certain conclusions at which I arrived independently' (Morgenthau quoted in Frei 2001, pp. 110, 112). Thus, in Morgenthau's own acknowledgment, his encounter with Niebuhr had more of a reconfirming character than a formative one.

After outlining the intellectual encounters of greatest importance for the shaping of Morgenthau's account, the thesis will proceed now to unpack the latter. Chapter 3 will explore the metaphysical foundation of Morgenthau's theory only hinted at in the thesis so far, and will point to Morgenthau's interpretation of Nietzsche's and

Weber's 'death of God' diagnosis, and to his scholarly interest in the status of 'truth', as a value of pivotal concern to debates on modernity and postmodernity.

Furthermore, the chapter will reveal that, by arguing against the generalised application of scientific methods, and by emphasising the consequences stirred by rationalist endeavours, Morgenthau mirrors Weber's insights. While doing this, he points to a dramatic phenomenon which will be analysed in chapter 4 at length, and which constitutes one of the original contributions brought by this reading to the ongoing re-evaluation of Morgenthau: the disenchantment of politics.

### **3. The 'Death of God' and the Crisis of Philosophy**

This chapter addresses the core of Morgenthau's theory by examining the metaphysical assumptions which underpin it, with an emphasis on Morgenthau's concern with the concept of 'truth'. The analysis which follows is important because it unravels the significance of the question of meaning in Morgenthau's theory, and argues implicitly for reconsidering strict materialistic readings of Morgenthau, and for focusing on the normative aspects of his thought, with all their value and sophistication. At the same time, this analysis points to the typically modern and postmodern opposite visions of 'truth' which both permeate Morgenthau's account, and shows that the issue of 'truth' is central to unlocking significant aspects of Morgenthau's metaphysics.

By contrast with other interpretations, this reading focuses on Morgenthau's concern with metaphysics explicitly, and it will analyse his arguments against the truth arrived at through rationalist methods, explaining them with an eye to Morgenthau's embracing of Nietzschean and Weberian assumptions. This chapter argues that Morgenthau adopts from Nietzsche the diagnosis of the 'death of God', and that the diagnosis exerts a fundamental influence on Morgenthau's thought: this grand theme pervades his vision of truth and power, of man and morality. Moreover, the problem of the status and legitimacy of truth is closely related to Morgenthau's

concern with the disintegration of morality: Morgenthau is aware that following the death of God, 'truth' as a value is called into question.

Despite the centrality assigned by Morgenthau to the concept of truth (see for example his essays which make up a book length discussion in *Truth and Power*, 1970), few scholars have attempted to analyse his account of 'truth' explicitly and systematically. A recent exception is represented by an article written by Sean Molloy, in which the author argues convincingly that 'truth' is a core concept, which dominates and conditions Morgenthau's thought about the nature of politics (Molloy 2004, p. 1). According to Molloy, Morgenthau's career revolved around a commitment to the discovery of the 'truth' of international politics, and an assertion of the primacy of power in this realm (Molloy 2004, p. 1). In Molloy's interpretation, for Morgenthau, the truth about international politics is 'intrinsically bound to power', the centrality of power standing as 'the ultimate reality and truth of international politics, as it permeates the social and political fabrics of human existence' (Molloy 2004, pp. 1-2).

The analysis undertaken here highlights Morgenthau's commitment to 'truth' as an 'ultimate value' (Morgenthau 1970, p. 14), and his interpretation of the 'truth' of the international realm, as captured by the dynamic picture of the struggle for power, understood as a struggle for the imposition of 'the truth' among various competing truths. This text will point to Morgenthau's reading of Nietzsche and Weber as the main factor which made an impact on his theory, and triggered metaphysical concerns which animated Morgenthau throughout his life. Moreover, this chapter will show that Morgenthau's interest in establishing the 'truth' of international politics parallels his similarly pivotal concern regarding the fragmentation of a universal realm of values, which in his view can hardly place any moral restrictions



upon the fight for power, and over truth, anymore. For Morgenthau, truth, power and morality are closely connected, and his analysis stands as a critique of central assumptions within modernity.

Belief in a harmonious ontology, endorsement of a universal concept of the self, uninhibited by specific location in time and space, and the subsequent denial of man's historicity and finitude, are in Petersen's view, the main characteristics of modernity, or what he terms 'modern thought' (Petersen 1999, p. 87). As Petersen reminds us, the 'death of God' 'denies modern thought access to the metaphysical resource it has relied upon, consciously or unconsciously, to successfully negotiate the dilemmas and uncertainties of man's empirical existence', and it 'throws into doubt the very possibility of truth, identity, and meaning by uprooting them from their foundation' (Petersen 1999, p. 87). Nietzsche's announcement – 'God is dead' - bears devastatingly upon the structure of modern thought, because the notion of God embodies 'a silent assumption, guaranteeing that human efforts to secure certainty in the realms of knowledge, meaning, morality, and political principles would not be in vain' (Petersen 1999, p. 87). Petersen concludes that Morgenthau is one of the scholars who try to work out the implications of Nietzsche's rearticulation of the relationship between man and the world (Petersen 1999, p. 87), and by doing this, he positions himself in an unusual way along the IR spectrum: rather than being in the midst of the grand narrative of modernity, Morgenthau 'is balancing on its edge' (Petersen 1999, p. 87).

As the present chapter will show, Morgenthau endorses the Nietzschean diagnosis regarding the disintegration of values, and argues that in the aftermath of the 'death of God' man 'discovers many little answers, but no answer to the great questions of his life, no meaning, no direction' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 176). He

adopts a certain kind of relativism, which in this thesis is interpreted as a philosophical orientation according to which, as Nardin describes it, ‘we must acknowledge the existence of many truths, each determined by whatever standards are used to define and measure truth’ (Nardin 1988, p. 150). Relativism implies that what counts as true in a given context depends upon the conventions of particular societies, traditions, scientific paradigms, or modes of discourse (see Nardin 1988, pp. 150-1). As Morgenthau puts it in *Science: Servant or Master?* – and this is a position he took throughout his career – ‘behind the multiplicity of truths that offer themselves as “the” truth, the concept of truth itself disappears’ (Morgenthau 1972, p. 21). Moreover, as Morgenthau argues in a famous 1979 lecture on the topic of human rights, one cannot say that this situation or that action is immoral per se: ‘you have to put it into context and adapt your judgment to particular circumstances’ (Morgenthau 1979, p. 10). The ‘truth’ of morality is plural to Morgenthau, and this makes him conclude in his book *In Defence of the National Interest*, that ‘the appeal to moral principles in the international sphere has no concrete universal meaning’, a situation which he is keen to portray and to examine extensively (Morgenthau 1982, p. 35). Morgenthau’s interest in metaphysics and his advocacy of a certain kind of relativism must have been challenging within the US academic environment, dominated by pragmatism, positivism, and by an overall optimism regarding the possibility of peace, progress and living universal values. As this thesis demonstrates with examples from both published and unpublished works, despite some aversion to his ideas, Morgenthau did not change them, and he continued to hold them up confidently to the end of his career.

By focusing on humans’ desire for meaning, certainty and security, Morgenthau exhibits a concern with the fate of human agency in a post-metaphysical world.

Moreover, as we will see, Morgenthau holds an understanding of the 'power phenomena' which emphasises creation through interpretation and meaning imposition, and he regards these phenomena as forming a unity in multiplicity, with each unit in the 'whole' – each man – containing the forces of destruction and construction, which actually symbolise the dangers and the possibilities opened up by 'the death of God'. What Morgenthau calls the 'tragic meaning' of modern existence, and also its 'irrationality' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 174), stem from man's nature itself, from its characteristics - more precisely, from the limitations demonstrated in dealing with a desire for power which all too easily generates destructiveness. Nevertheless, Morgenthau's account also reflects the well-known Nietzschean theme of overcoming. He suggests that, through mastering the lust for power - by, at first, acknowledging its existence and understanding its inner dynamics, and then by employing power responsibly - man's actions may account not only for destruction, but also for construction. Here, and especially in the portrayal of the genuine statesman, as a responsible, constructive force acting within the confines of a disenchanted political scene, we can perceive Weber's contribution to the shaping of Morgenthau's perspective. A detailed analysis of the key concepts in Morgenthau's theory, according to the present interpretation – disenchantment/re-enchantment of politics, responsible and wise leadership - will be undertaken in chapter 4.

The present chapter begins with an examination of Morgenthau's interpretation of the 'death of God', and of man's fate in such times characterised by relativism and perspectivism, and by a rationalization which Morgenthau is keen to criticize. Morgenthau regards the death of God as both a loss and an opportunity, and he maintains that it provides conditions for both destructive and constructive

endeavours. The chapter continues with an analysis of the dark, destructive side of human nature in Morgenthau's account, which fights over power, and then employs it to bring about disastrous outcomes. The chapter concludes with an outline of Morgenthau's vision of the superior human agent, whose act of meaning imposition is portrayed positively. While this chapter focuses on Morgenthau's metaphysics, chapter 4 will concentrate on Morgenthau's translation of his metaphysics into an understanding of politics, with an emphasis on Morgenthau's account of political leadership.

### **3.1 The Experience of Nihilism and Disenchantment**

Hans Morgenthau's interpretation of modernity following the 'death of God' forms the foundation on which he posits his theory of the political, and as such it makes up a sophisticated background which remained remarkably unchanged throughout his career. This approach helped him to develop a complex view on the topic, which he refined and enriched throughout the years, adding more to his discussion of meaning and disenchantment. To his disadvantage, he was vulnerable to accusations of rigidity and un-openness, and appeared uneasy with accommodating change. The present thesis interprets this as a self-imposed strategy on Morgenthau's part, who continuously attempted to raise his contemporaries' awareness on the same topics of the death of God and the disenchantment and loss of meaning in politics, in his belief that changes had yet to take place. Judging from Morgenthau's constant pessimism on the topic, it can be argued that Morgenthau did not see any particular change taking place with regard to the death of the universal God of values and the disenchantment of the political space. As such, he did not see reasons to alter his assumptions, and he maintained his views by virtue of their ongoing relevance to the topic of his enquiry, and in accord with his strategic aim of raising the others' awareness.

In one of the early unpublished international relations lectures, Morgenthau points to the breakdown of universal religion and universal humanism, and argues that the 'universal ties' which bind men together have become weaker and weaker (Lecture 16, 6 February 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 8). To him, moderns live in a revolutionary age, which 'has broken with the political, moral, and technological traditions of the Western world' (2<sup>nd</sup> Lecture at the Oriental Institute, 31 March 1950, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 1). Meanwhile, in *Scientific Man vs Power Politics*, his first book published in the United States, Morgenthau asserts that man is a creature which has recently 'lost its animal innocence and security' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 9), and he is aware of the role played by the disintegration of the value systems of a religious nature. Years later, in *The Decline of Democratic Politics*, we find Morgenthau pointing to the 'successful attack' to which the tradition of Western thought has been exposed in the last two centuries, to 'the disintegration of the great intellectual systems from which the Western world used to receive its meaning' (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 4). Furthermore, in an article published in 1971 and a book from 1972, Morgenthau focuses his attention on the same theme, and advances similar conclusions: he argues that moderns live in a secular age which has lost 'faith in individual immortality in other worlds' (see Morgenthau 1972, p. 150). They live in a threatening world, plagued by an unprecedented increase in physical danger, social disintegration, and metaphysical doubt (Morgenthau 1971, p. 621), a world in which they experience the 'existential dread', and get to taste 'the transitoriness and absurdity of all life' (Morgenthau 1971, pp. 626, 629).

Morgenthau's picture of the world encompasses no ranking of values, and faces instead struggle and devaluation. Morgenthau maintains in *Scientific Man vs Power Politics* that the modern world resembles a stage where the human individual plays a

role in a story 'of inner insecurity, of the anticipation of impending doom, of metaphysical anxieties' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 9). Morgenthau emphasises that in the nineteenth century, man's sense of insecurity started to increase, nourishing within it an acute social instability, and that in the twentieth, 'intensified individual frustrations and anxieties' became permanent, 'as a result of the weakening of the ties of tradition, especially in the form of religion, of increased rationalization of life and work, and of cyclical economic crises' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 77). Time and again, Morgenthau mentions that humans live in an age in which religion can no longer assure salvation. Within this context, in an early work he makes reference to the 'twilight of international morality' (Morgenthau 1948), while in a later one he points to the current 'general decline' in the adherence to moral values (see Morgenthau 1979, esp. p. 10). In Morgenthau's account, the moral restraints that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries contributed greatly to the civilized relations among nations 'are in the process of weakening, if not disappearing' (Morgenthau 1979, p. 3). He warns his readers about the 'total dissolution' of the moral order (Morgenthau quoted in Frei 2001, p. 143) and, in *Science: Servant or Master?*, he points to the 'empty transcendent space' pessimistically (Morgenthau 1972, p. 14). In one of Morgenthau's most famous metaphoric formulations, expressed in the seminal work *Politics among Nations*, all men now meet 'under an empty sky from which the gods have departed' (Morgenthau 1949, p. 196). The decline of metaphysics with all its certain meanings and values supposedly fixed once and for all represents a continuous concern for Morgenthau. He reacts to environmental factors and questions the optimism of the American academia, with a view to raising awareness on the above collapse of tradition and its constituting values, and on the perils of meaninglessness.

It is here that one can notice Morgenthau's taking up of the Nietzschean problematic of the 'death of God', which as Ansell-Pearson notes, encompasses the degradation of 'the traditional metaphysical-moral structure which enables us to make sense of existence, to give it a meaning' (Ansell-Pearson 1994, pp. 85-6). As Nietzsche once put it, 'one interpretation has collapsed; but because it was considered *the* interpretation, it now seems as if there were no meaning at all in existence, as if everything were in vain' (Nietzsche 1968, p. 35). A consequence of this collapse is represented by the fact that 'the highest values devalue themselves' (Nietzsche 1968, p. 9), and nihilism occurs. In Nietzsche's words, 'our existence (action, suffering, willing, feeling) has no meaning, 'the pathos of "in vain" is the nihilists' pathos—at the same time, as pathos, an inconsistency on the part of the nihilists' (Nietzsche 1968, p. 211).

Pangle argues that Nietzsche is aware of man's striving for meaning (a position and a concern which we find in Morgenthau as well), and of the fact that the death of God brings forward the issues of meaning and historicity: 'God's existence, like every other meaningful existence, is temporal or historical' (Pangle 1983, p. 45). In Pangle's assessment of the Nietzschean position, people must experience meaningful existence, their physical being 'must be understood as dedicated to, and in some circumstances to be sacrificed for, some way of life which makes demands far beyond what is required for security or creature comforts (Pangle 1983, p. 47). Pangle correctly identifies that for Nietzsche, it is this need that defines the human, setting man apart from all other existence' (Pangle 1983, p. 45, p. 47). Following the death of a universal realm of values likely to provide guidance, man's shifting, subjective will stands as the only source of meaning and order (Pangle 1983, p. 65), and the awareness of the historicity and subjectivity of all meaning triggers man's



discontent with his life. As Pangle concludes, in the aftermath of the collapse of values, meaning springs from 'the mutable inventiveness or creativity of man' (Pangle 1983, pp. 49, 66).

Similarly to Nietzsche, Morgenthau maintains that it is in man's nature to strive for security and certainty (Morgenthau quoted in Frei 2001, p. 102), and to value these highly. However, he also notes that following the 'death of God', instead of feeling certain in his beliefs and secure within the boundaries of his existence, the human individual experiences the opposite: he is lost in uncertainty, feels insecure and lonely. This position is expressed most clearly in Morgenthau's 'twin' books, which outline similar perspectives on similar topics, despite being written 25 years apart, *Scientific Man vs Power Politics* and *Science: Servant or Master?* (1972) In the first one, Morgenthau argues that man finds himself at the center of an unceasing struggle, between his understanding and the 'riddles of the world'. In a moving paragraph, he explains that this is

a struggle which offers with each answer new questions, with each victory a new disappointment, and thus seems to lead nowhere. In this labyrinth of unconnected causal connections, man discovers many little answers but no answers to the great questions of his life, no meaning, no direction (Morgenthau 1947, p. 176).

Meanwhile, in *Science: Servant or Master?*, Morgenthau argues that, in confronting a threatening world, overwhelmed by such a moral crisis, man's strength springs from his becoming conscious of experience through thought (Morgenthau 1972, p. 44). However, he is aware that now man's quest for causes, laws, and meaning is answered 'incompletely or not at all', and that all that man can be sure of

at present, are 'the illusion of knowledge and the certainty of ignorance' (Morgenthau 1972, pp. 25-6). In Morgenthau's diagnosis, in the sphere of the natural sciences, it is at best 'still possible' to distinguish between true and false. Meanwhile, in the field of social action, 'one can still distinguish between useful and useless, but no longer between good and bad, valuable and worthless' (Morgenthau 1972, pp. 28-9).

As noted earlier, Morgenthau is concerned with the status and appeal of truth, following the collapse of universal values. For him, in such times when certainty and security are difficult to be achieved, truth as a universal standard with a settled meaning is called into question. In *Science: Servant or Master?*, Morgenthau emphasises that instead of a singular truth springing from a singular interpretation, humans now live in a competition over truth - in Morgenthau's formulation, the place of truth 'as a universally valid principle' is occupied by 'a multiplicity of different truths, coordinated to different types of man' (Morgenthau 1972, p. 21). When truth received meaning from transcendent objective values, truth had a claim on the individual (Morgenthau 1972, p. 3). At present, Morgenthau implies that this does not seem to be the case anymore, and the concept of 'truth' itself disappears (Morgenthau 1972, p. 21). As Morgenthau warns in his 1979 lecture on the topic of human rights, the breaking up of 'truth' has led to an interpretative hiatus whose consequences humans are only 'dimly aware' (Morgenthau 1979, p. 34).

As seen from the introduction to the chapter, by adopting this position regarding the plurality of truths which comes after the 'death of God', Morgenthau agrees with a certain degree of relativism, which can be understood as a philosophical orientation which implies that there are many kinds of truth, and that what counts as true in a given context 'depends upon the conventions of particular societies, traditions,

scientific paradigms, or modes of discourse' (Nardin 1988, pp. 150-1). In line with the Nietzschean diagnosis, Morgenthau emphasises the relativity of moral judgment, and moreover he sees it as both a loss and an opportunity. As he states, truth is plural, and 'you cannot say that this action or that action is immoral per se', but 'you have to put it into context and adapt your judgment to particular circumstances' (Morgenthau 1979, p. 10). Anthony Lang correctly identifies in his discussion of Morgenthau's lectures on Aristotle that on the one hand, Morgenthau refuses to accept the relativistic accounts of the political realm, 'pointing out that our daily discourse is imbued with moral principles' (Lang 2004, p. 7). On the other hand however, he 'does argue for a larger form of moral relativism, one based on a historical frame and national context' (Lang 2004, p. 7). As Morgenthau puts it, in the context of his discussion of the supposedly universal character of human rights,

It is a relativism in time (...) when certain principles are applicable in one period of history and not applicable in another period of history, and it is a relativism in terms of culture – of contemporaneous culture – in that certain principles are obeyed by certain nations, by certain political civilizations, and are not obeyed by others (Morgenthau 1979, p. 4).

Moreover, Morgenthau's diagnosis emphasises perspectivism, the latter representing Morgenthau's Nietzschean-like attempt to replace epistemology with, as Strong remarks, 'an understanding of the self and of knowledge that does not posit any particular position (or self) as final' (Strong 1985, p. 165). By submitting to this perspectivist vision Morgenthau implies, in a Nietzschean-like fashion, that the 'real world' has become 'a myth': humans can not grasp 'one' reality, instead they

encounter a flow of various interpretations, and a diversity of meanings of 'the truth'. Perspectivism frames the problem as one of the relation between the individual and the external world, and following from this, Morgenthau always maintains that norms, truth and meaning are constituted at the level of autonomous individuals. As emphasised by Morgenthau in a relevant unpublished lecture, the influence of the 'personal equation' of the observer upon the truth should not be overlooked: in a given situation, there can be 'if not 5 different truths, then 5 different formulations of truth stressing different points of view' (Lecture 2, 4 January 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 12).

For Morgenthau, modernity symbolises a time of opportunity, but also one of loss: the 'death of God' and the subsequent awareness of relativism and perspectivism allow for the unfolding of man's creative powers (the positive outcome), while refusing him certainty and security (the negative outcome). Morgenthau often points to the decline in the adherence to moral values, and to what he takes to be a general decay of the respect for human life, 'probably stimulated by technology' (Morgenthau 1979, p. 14). His theory is an ethical theory, and it exhibits its author's concern with morality, in an age in which the transcendent space is empty, religion can no longer assure salvation (see Morgenthau 1972, esp. p. 40), and various interpretations and perspectives stand in conflictual positions with each other. In such times, when there is no universal moral order able to provide guidance anymore, Morgenthau argues that men live consciously in the presence of death (Morgenthau 1972, p. 54), in empirical and metaphysical danger. As Morgenthau points out in *Science: Servant or Master?*, in an ingenious reinterpretation of a well-known Kantian dictum, 'to live in consciousness of danger means to live in fear, and

to live like that is a risky adventure. That is what *sapere aude* means' (Morgenthau 1972, p. 55).

What strikes us as particularly important in Morgenthau's account of modernity in the aftermath of the 'death of God', is that his diagnosis is always accompanied by the forceful expression of his discontent with humanity's response to the crisis. Morgenthau states that men now live in an era characterised by a devastating 'crisis of philosophy', an age 'first, of uneasy confusion, then, of cynical despair' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 10). Equally important for Morgenthau, the situation is aggravated by humans' inability to address the ongoing decline properly: man's response is inadequate and weak to Morgenthau, and it perpetuates the crisis. As he puts it, what we see as novelty in the current situation is human anxieties' 'strength and confusion', but also 'their absence in the main currents of philosophy and political thought' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 9). Keen to raise awareness of the impasse in which we find ourselves today, from a philosophical point of view (see Lang 2004, p. 22), Morgenthau argues in the 1979 human rights lecture that humans face a 'revolutionary' situation, from which they have not drawn 'any important consequences in terms of organization, way of thinking, and moral principles' (Morgenthau 1979, p. 42).

Which is the philosophy whose inadequacy is emphasised by Morgenthau in the above quotations? His answer to the question develops into a thoroughgoing critique of this mode of thought, characterised by a glorification of the force of reason: it represents what Morgenthau calls 'the philosophy of rationalism', or 'scientism'. To eliminate doubts over his employment of the terms, Morgenthau states in an unpublished lecture that, in his interpretation, 'rationalism' and 'rationalistic' refer to 'the philosophical movement which is identified with the Age of Reason, and whose

tenets, especially in the form of positivism and scientism, have since become an intrinsic element of our culture' (undated lecture, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169).

One of the first significant expositions of Morgenthau's critique is contained in *Scientific Man vs Power Politics*, which was written against the background of the behaviourist revolution, then emerging in US universities. Morgenthau tells his readers that the main characteristic of this trend of thought is the reliance on reason to find 'the truths of philosophy, ethics, and politics alike and through its own inner force to re-create reality in the image of these truths' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 10). A further analysis reveals two important features:

The conception of the social and the physical world as being intelligible through the same rational processes... and the conviction that understanding in terms of these rational processes is all that is needed for the rational control of the social and the physical world (Morgenthau 1947, p. 11).

This mode of thought, which gives the appearance of 'eternal verities' to certain assumptions 'which are true, if at all, under the conditions of a particular historical experience' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 12), praises a concept of the physical world 'erected into an idol and emulated as a model', pervaded by rational laws, and capable 'of complete rational determination' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 115). Like Nietzsche who, in Jurgen Habermas's words, wanted 'to explode the framework of Occidental rationalism' (Habermas 1987, p. 74), with its never ending trust in reason, Morgenthau in his turn is eager to prove the flawed nature of this trend of thought. He argues that the present age lives under the signs of both confidence and despair, and points out that this state of affairs works against rationalism: while confidence is

directed to the power of reason, as represented by modern science, to solve the social problems, its 'twin feeling' – the much more pervasive despair – is stirred by the significant failure of scientific reason to solve them (Morgenthau 1947, p. 9). Last but not least, Morgenthau asks us to approach rationalism critically. We will then see that it 'misunderstands the nature of man, the nature of the world, and the nature of reason itself' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 174). What rationalism's proponents praise is 'simple, rational, mechanical', while what they have to deal with is 'complicated, irrational, incalculable' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 86).

It is important to emphasise at this point that, despite his aversion to rationalism and to what he perceives to be its proponents' efforts to impose a meaning which is alien to the social realm, characterised by unpredictable changes, Morgenthau nevertheless hangs on to a sense of the rational, and he is against irrationality. This view is supported by Molloy, who indicates that Morgenthau's main complaint with rationalism is 'its misunderstanding of the nature of social knowledge', and that Morgenthau constructs his stance in opposition 'to the excessive empiricism of the American foreign policy elite' - and here the importance of the contextual factors is emphasised (Molloy 2004, pp. 3, 4). This does not mean, however, that Morgenthau 'dispenses with the category of the rational in its entirety' (Molloy 2004, p. 3). As emphasised by Molloy, there is a clear distinction in Morgenthau's works between rationalism and rationality: 'where rationalism provides merely an illusion of control over knowledge derived from a traditionalist interpretation of science, rationality is an effective approach to knowledge, it is what makes knowledge possible in international relations' (Molloy 2004, p. 3). Molloy contends further that the argument of rationality giving meaning to the social world represents 'the foundation of Morgenthau's approach to the formulation of the six principles of political

realism' (Molloy 2004, pp. 3-4). Morgenthau's approach to knowledge and his endorsement of rationality will be fully explored in the next chapters.

As with his later works, in *Scientific Man vs Power Politics* Morgenthau is categorical: he claims that rationalism 'cannot give meaning to the experiences of the mid-twentieth century' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 10). Moreover, he points to the most dangerous consequence of employing the same rationalist processes when addressing social issues: modern mind's tendencies 'to look in social affairs for a certainty in planning and prediction that is as unattainable here as elsewhere' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 120), have left man 'impoverished in his quest for an answer to the riddle of the universe, and of his existence in it' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 111). In Morgenthau's picture, the individual subjected to such 'rational enterprises' is 'poorer':

By destroying the confidence of the human mind in the answers that art, religion, and metaphysics could give and by holding out the hope, bound to be disappointed, that it had all answers to all questions, rationalism has left man the poorer and has made the burden of life harder to bear (Morgenthau 1947, p. 110).

In Morgenthau's account, in the aftermath of the 'death of God', rationalization has stripped the world of its wonders, and has de-magified humans' existence, opening it up to a variety of interpretations, meanings and self-proclaimed truths. The mysteries of the world have ceased to amaze with their secrecy, and have become instead victims of a ruthless drive to impose a rationalist interpretation of them all. At this point we can start to see our 'Weberian Morgenthau', who links Nietzsche's diagnosis of the 'death of God' and the awareness of nihilism, to the topic of disenchantment, thoroughly analysed by Max Weber.



The never-ending ‘worship’ of reason’s scientific embodiment is regarded with horror by both Weber and Morgenthau. Against those who assert the positive contribution of technology and rationalism to the construction of society, Morgenthau emphasises the cancerous growth of technology, which duplicates the meaningless growth of science (Morgenthau 1947, pp. 11, 23). As Morgenthau mentions in one of his unpublished lectures, the factory assembly line stands as a metaphor of life after the death of God, and it replicates the degeneration of the meaningfulness of work: ‘the individual is no longer capable of understanding what he is working for, and he no longer derives any satisfaction from it’ (Lecture 10, 10 May 1962, Morgenthau Papers, Box 171, p. 11). Morgenthau’s attack against rationalism and technology shows up in many of his writings, and technological advancement is presented as inherently bad. In the context of a bipolar world made of two superpowers eager to increase their weapons arsenal, and with a view to Morgenthau’s witnessing of the horrors of the Second World War made worse by technological developments, his critique is hardly surprising. Nevertheless, it is also uni-dimensional and ignores the benefits brought about by technological advancement (such as those in the field of medicine for instance), and this represents a weakness in Morgenthau’s account.

We have already seen that Hennis identifies Weber as the first scholar who draws ‘the most radical scientific conclusions from Nietzsche’s diagnosis of nihilism’ (Hennis 1988, pp. 158-9). Weber points to the phenomenon of disenchantment as no less than ‘the fate of our times’ (Weber 1948, p. 155). At present, Weber argues, one can, in principle, master all things by calculation, since ‘there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play’ (Weber 1948, p. 139). In one of his most famous quotations, Weber maintains that modern life is comprised of an unceasing

struggle among various gods, who, since they are disenchanted, take the form of impersonal forces. Weber warns his readers that our civilization 'destines us to realize more clearly these struggles again, after our eyes have been blinded for a thousand years' by the orientation towards the 'grandiose moral fervor' of Christian ethics (Weber 1948, p. 144). As Weber maintains, the ultimately possible attitudes toward life are irreconcilable, the struggle can never be brought to a final conclusion, and thus 'it is necessary to make a decisive choice' (Weber 1948, p. 140).

In the ongoing battle over values, science can only prove its weaknesses and inabilities. Scientific knowledge is unable to provide meaning when applied to the social sciences domain because here it cannot provide clear cut answers. Moreover, it also brings about negative outcomes, by disenchanting the field of enquiry within which its methods are applied. After all, Weber asks rhetorically, who else, aside from certain 'big children' to be found in the natural sciences, still believes 'that the findings of astronomy, biology, physics, or chemistry could teach us anything about the *meaning* of the world?' In Weber's categorical conclusion,

If these natural sciences lead to anything in this way, they are apt to make the belief that there is such a thing as the 'meaning' of the universe die out at its very roots (Weber 1948, p. 145).

Weber's concerns are echoed by Morgenthau, whose interpretation of the issue mirrors his interest in depicting the outcomes of the rationalization enterprises in the political realm. Morgenthau argues that the modern technology of warfare represents a new element in the history of the western world, which can lead either to peace or to universal destruction. While wishing for the former,

Morgenthau is also very concerned with the increased prospects for arriving at the latter. As he contends in *Truth and Power*, science has given us mastery over a doubly monstrous world, which 'sacrifices human ends to technological means, as well as the needs of the many to the enrichment and power of the few, and thereby diminishes the stature of man, and threatens his very existence' (Morgenthau 1970, pp. 433-4). Moreover, in *Science: Servant or Master?*, Morgenthau decries the fact that the human individual has turned into a hapless object of the technological developments and political possibilities, and he is now 'shaking his fists in impotent rage at those autonomous forces, which control a goodly fraction of his life, but which he cannot control' (Morgenthau 1972, p. 4). Morgenthau emphasises the contrast which, in his view, exists between the achievements and promises of science, on the one hand, and 'a malaise that, for the first time in recorded human history, is not limited to a particular civilization, but has become a universal phenomenon encompassing humanity' (Morgenthau 1972, p. 4). In this account, humans enjoy 'diminished freedom' (Morgenthau 1970, p. 434):

While science thus elates man with the promise to transform *homo faber*, the maker of tools, into *homo deus*, the maker of worlds, it also depresses him. By the same token that it promises him the creation of new worlds, it threatens to destroy the only world he has known, and has already destroyed a significant part of it (Morgenthau 1972, p. 2).

A detailed interpretation of what I will refer to as 'the disenchantment of politics', which is caused by the proponents of rationalism, will be undertaken in chapter 4. In what follows, I will return to the original point of departure – the

diagnosis of 'the death of God' – in order to lead the reader to Morgenthau's interpretation of the human individual, who occupies a central place in this diagnosis, and who can both generate and alleviate the above disenchantment, in his ruthless fight over meaning imposition. As mentioned earlier, Morgenthau, like Nietzsche, is aware of man's need to find meaning in his life, and of his metaphysical disposition towards security and certainty. In both their accounts, the death of God makes the creation of meaning of utmost concern to individuals. For both Nietzsche and Morgenthau, the process of meaning creation is central in a time in which the desire for self-affirmation clashes with the need to find refuge in the certainty provided by universal standards and a universal interpretation. It is a contradictory situation, which both interpreters are eager to examine.

In *Purpose of American Politics*, Morgenthau admits that, well after the weakening of universal moral values, man still values security, preferring 'the certainty of what he has achieved to the risks and promises of further achievements' (Morgenthau 1983, p. 236). However, the act of valuing security, despite knowing that 'beyond the frontiers of his achievements still lie so many new worlds to be conquered' (Morgenthau 1983, p. 236), appears to Morgenthau as detrimental to the affirmation of man's creative potentialities. In a similar vein, he argues that the society of present times 'compels its members to live below their capabilities', it 'misdirects their energies', and discourages and neglects excellence that does not conform (Morgenthau 1983, p. 225). In Morgenthau's interpretation, by seeking security in 'collective myths' rather than in his own soul, modern man abandons his 'creative solitude' for a collectivization in which he 'loses the fearful disquiet in the face of the incomprehensible and, with it, the ability to comprehend' (Morgenthau quoted in Russell 1990, p. 77). Morgenthau argues that, instead of seeking comfort in

the illusion of a universal meaning, what humans must do now is to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the 'death of God'.

Thus, to Morgenthau, like Nietzsche, these times offer men conditions for the fuller expression of their potentialities, these times are here to grant them what has been long denied – as Nietzsche asks rhetorically, 'what could one create if gods existed?' (Nietzsche 1968, p. 122). Moreover, Morgenthau argues that now suffering is a main feeling experienced by humans, yet he also highlights the relevance and value of creation, in this context – let us not forget that for Nietzsche, creation was 'the great redemption from suffering and life's growing light' (Nietzsche quoted in Kaufmann 1954, p. 199). Echoing the Nietzschean dictum, Morgenthau pleads for 'a new way of thinking', for 'a transformation of man himself in his moral, rational, and political qualities' (Morgenthau quoted in Russell 1990, p. 70). He asks his fellow men to put to rest conformism, certainty and security, and to wake up to their creative capabilities, letting their imagination accomplish relevant creative tasks. In Morgenthau's view, the death of God should be regarded as an excellent opportunity for man to re-invent himself, and such an opportunity should not be missed. As he argues in *Science: Servant or Master?*, a 'new man' is set to emerge, one who 'can only create himself step by step, piecemeal, through the absorption of every new experience with which the technological age confronts him' (Morgenthau 1972, p. 71). The 'death of God' is definitely a time of taking chances: although unable to live without 'social ties', the individual alone, in the solitude of his autonomous reflection, decides his fate. Man's future depends ultimately upon himself (Morgenthau 1972, p. 71).

In such times, when 'whatever man does or intends to do emanates from himself and refers again to himself' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 163), Morgenthau argues that the

human individual's dynamic, multiply layered nature, should be a main theoretical area of concern. As the present analysis demonstrates, Morgenthau taken on a vision of the human which echoes Nietzsche's: the human self stands as a place of struggles, overwhelmed by opposed forces. Most importantly, Morgenthau maintains that man's essence comprises a dynamic relation between destruction and construction: as he asserts in an unpublished manuscript, 'man is a mixture of good and evil tendencies' (Lecture 7, 24 April 1962, Morgenthau Papers, Box 171, p. 3). As Nietzsche once put it, 'in man there is matter, fragment, excess, clay, mud, madness, chaos; but in man there is also creator, sculptor, the hardness of the hammer, the divine spectator and the seventh day' (Nietzsche 1990, p. 155). For Morgenthau as well, as seen from the above quotation, in man "creature and "creator" are united' (Nietzsche 1990, p. 155). In Kaufmann's formulation, for Nietzsche man is 'the human and the all-too-human, the superhuman and the animalic' (see Kaufmann 1974, p. 310). As Morgenthau puts this in a published work, when he discusses the status of man as the object of study of the social sciences, the human individual should not be regarded as a product of nature, 'but as both the creature and the creator of history in and through which his individuality and freedom of choice manifest themselves' (Morgenthau 1955, p. 441).

In Morgenthau's account expressed in *Science: Servant or Master?*, man once 'beheld in shocked wonderment the sun and sea, the beasts and the elements, birth and death'; by contrast, he now searches 'for the understanding and mastery of the incomprehensible yet familiar threats emanating from himself' (Morgenthau 1972, p. 29). In Morgenthau's pessimistic conclusion, the mysteries which man has understood and mastered to such an unprecedented extent in inanimate nature, make him 'helpless in the face of human nature, that is, his own' (Morgenthau 1972, p.

29). The source of the threat is to be found in the destructive potential, which man carries within him. Thus, in man there can be no construction without destruction in Morgenthau's vision. As we will see in chapters 4 and 5 in detail, he is far from pleading in favour of purposeless destruction, and advocates actions carried out responsibly, and directed towards re-enchantment.

The next section turns to the 'creature' facet of man's nature, mentioned above, and to Morgenthau's interpretation of power as meaning imposition, while the final section will examine the 'creator' facet, and it will also pave the way to the analysis of Morgenthau's political theory to be undertaken in chapter 4.

### **3.2 Man as Creature: the Fight over Power as Meaning Imposition**

On many occasions, Morgenthau links his discussion of power as meaning imposition with that of the negative outcomes stirred by the 'death of God'. He is aware of the negative potential of the struggle for power understood as action for action's sake, and refers to the latter in negative terms. In *Science: Servant or Master?* for example, he emphasises the dangers likely to follow from the death of God. In a time with no values universally endorsed, man returns to an obscurantist, aimless activism – what Morgenthau calls an 'intoxication of incessant activity' (Morgenthau 1972, pp. 47-8). In his view, man is likely to find in 'action as such' the highest source of meaning, and he sets out to transform the world through the vital force of his individuality (Morgenthau 1972, p. 48). Morgenthau draws our attention to the fact that the refuge into action is common to man and beast. Despite this similarity, the beast 'does not need a further refuge because it is not reflectively conscious of the insufficiency of action' (Morgenthau 1972, p. 53). Unlike the animals, man experiences in action his 'impotence' as well: in an interesting formulation which echoes Nietzsche's, Morgenthau tells us that man alone 'has the gift of reflective consciousness, of thinking of the past and the future' (Morgenthau 1972, p. 53).



Morgenthau is keen to emphasise that action for action's sake does not provide man with answers to the 'metaphysical shock', that salvation from 'empirical misery' and 'metaphysical doubt' is not possible by means of acting in this way (Morgenthau 1971, pp. 622-3). He points out that action as such carries no creative force within it, and it hardly reconciles the 'perplexity' of the human soul with an unfriendly world. He argues against filling in the aftermath of the death of God with a philosophical attitude which celebrates creativity for its own sake, against succumbing under the 'insufficiency of action', and under an empty activism. Within this context, in his essay *The Escape from Power*, Morgenthau points critically towards totalitarianism, as an example of such a philosophical attitude. As he maintains, for the totalitarian, power is not only a fact of social life, but also 'the ultimate standard for judging human affairs and the ideal source of all human values' (Morgenthau 1962a, pp. 316-7).

What Morgenthau emphasises – and this is a very important distinction to draw attention to – is the idea that man now has the possibility to engage in genuine creative deeds, which are not simply imbued with the glorification of action for action's sake, and of power per se (Morgenthau's solution advanced against meaningless creation/action for action's sake will be discussed at length in chapter 5). Thus, starting from the Nietzschean diagnosis of the 'death of God', Morgenthau follows Nietzsche's views also concerning human beings' increased prospects for agency manifestation, for individual affirmation, as one of the consequences of this 'death'.

In Morgenthau's interpretation, the human being, a creature who has 'lost its animal innocence and security', is now striving to recapture this innocence and security 'in religious, moral and social worlds of its own' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 9).

These words spell out Morgenthau's view regarding our times' creative opportunities. Morgenthau implies that this is, indeed, an era that grants man's imagination - which 'creates new worlds that live after their creator' (Morgenthau 1962c, p. 20) - its proper place. For Morgenthau, the social world captures man in his overwhelming dynamism, in all his gestures and capacities, as endowed with the gift of creating his own interpretation of the world, that is, his own 'version' of the meaning of existence, his own tablet of values: as Nietzsche himself once put it, now each mind 'creates a meaning for the earth' (Nietzsche quoted in Kaufmann 1954, p. 144). One of the innovative features of the argument of this thesis, which departs from materialistic readings of Morgenthau in order to demonstrate the importance of the issue of meaning for his discussion of politics, is the focus on Morgenthau's interpretation of creation as the creation of values. Consequently, the argument that follows will focus on this particular understanding. This thesis argues that there is no better way to grasp Morgenthau's views on the topic of creation than to analyse the concept of 'power', which Morgenthau interprets as meaning imposition. The thesis maintains that the triad creation-power-meaning imposition works best in spelling out Morgenthau's vision of politics, and it illuminates an understanding of power which points to the latter's creative essence. To Morgenthau 'power' is not synonymous to a mere act of one's influencing of the other, but to a creative endeavour par excellence, to a creative struggle of imposing particular values and interpretations.

Morgenthau makes a distinction between irresponsible power and creation for creation's sake, and responsible power, employed by the superior agent who creates and then imposes values which are in accord with the teachings of what Morgenthau calls 'tradition'. In his article *The Evil of Power*, published at the beginning of his

academic career in the US, and in which we can distinguish reminiscences of his personal experience, Morgenthau maintains that power is not a metaphysical abstraction ‘which has an essence, a life, a behaviour of its own’ (Morgenthau 1950, p. 514). In Morgenthau’s account, power is an intrinsic element of life, which manifests itself in various forms, and has a protean nature, changeable and contingent – as he argues, when criticising what he calls ‘bad metaphysics’, ‘the metaphysics of power distorts, if it does not blot out, the reality of power’ (Morgenthau 1950, p. 515). Moreover, in Morgenthau’s view expressed at length in his centrepiece *Politics among Nations*, ‘power’ stands as ‘man’s control over the minds and actions of other men’ (Morgenthau 1949, p. 73). As Morgenthau nuances his position in a later work, power stands as a psychological relationship in which one controls certain actions of another ‘through the influence he exerts over the latter’s will’ (Morgenthau 1962c, p. 193). Man’s aspiration for power is not ‘an accident’ of history, or a temporary deviation: to Morgenthau, it is ‘an all-permeating fact which is of the very essence of human existence’ (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 312). The struggle for power represents ‘a general phenomenon of human life in society and must be regarded as such’: our whole social life ‘is interspersed with the element of power’, Morgenthau argues in an unpublished lecture (Lecture 7, 16 January 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 5). Last but not least, in a much quoted essay, Morgenthau compares love and power – an unusual comparison by his own account – and concludes that the two are similar since they both try to overcome loneliness, and the sense of man’s insufficiency ‘which stems from this loneliness’ (Morgenthau 1970, p. 8). Through power, Morgenthau maintains, man ‘seeks to impose his will upon another man, so that the will of the object of his power mirrors his own’ (Morgenthau 1970, p. 8). Moreover, while love is ‘reunion through spontaneous

mutuality', power 'seeks to create a union through unilateral imposition' (Morgenthau 1970, p. 8).

Petersen emphasises that, like Nietzsche, Morgenthau is preoccupied with searching for 'a new metaphysical principle' (Petersen 1999, p. 89). Moreover, Morgenthau's thinking - rather than being epistemological or methodological in character - is 'first and foremost metaphysical and ontological' (Petersen 1999, p. 89). Petersen argues that Morgenthau's concept of power 'represents the next stage in his fundamental *Auseinandersetzung*, or critical encounter, with the modern tradition' (Petersen 1999, p. 90), and that power, or more precisely the lust for power, appears like 'an alternative metaphysical principle through which to make intelligible the existence of order' (Petersen 1999, p. 89). As Petersen argues further, for Morgenthau power 'does not refer to an absolute hovering above or beyond the world, but to the quality of the concrete relations through which a world is made to stand' (Petersen 1999, p. 90). The Nietzschean will to power 'makes unity and totality intelligible without grounding them in a higher unity', and Morgenthau's concept of power appears to Petersen 'to have such an all-encompassing quality, that it gives the lie to the idea that it is simply, as is commonly assumed, to be equated with material capabilities' (Petersen 1999, p. 93).

Petersen's account is persuasive and important in its findings regarding the metaphysical character of Morgenthau's writings and his views of power in particular. This vision of power is forcefully outlined in Morgenthau's discussions on the topic, especially in his assumptions according to which in order for someone to have 'power', thus 'to make one's own person prevail against others' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 166), (s)he must exert control over the minds. Such a form of control, manifesting itself as one's 'rule' over others' opinions, decisions and subsequent

actions, points to intra human relations as the *locus classicus* in the shaping of power. Moreover, it is clear that it also points towards Morgenthau's concern with man's creative, interpretative potential. The above-mentioned control refers – and this is one important contribution brought to the ongoing discussion of Morgenthau's theory by the present thesis - to one's act of imposing a certain 'version', a certain interpretation of reality, upon the others: a meaning imposition. The present reinterpretation thus builds on the findings popularised by Petersen in order to bring to light a facet of Morgenthau's theory which has been neglected by observers: that of power as meaning creation and imposition, which exhibits Morgenthau's concern with the idea of meaning in a post-metaphysical world, and demonstrates his relevance to current discussions on meaning and truth in modernity and postmodernity.

Morgenthau subscribes to an individualist ontology in which meaning imposition is less a matter of institutional relations, and more one of individual relations. In Morgenthau's account, power is a relational concept. One's power needs others' presence and recognition, power belongs to the area of social interactions through which humans want 'to assert themselves as individuals against the world by mastering it' (Morgenthau 1972, p. 31), and just like for Nietzsche, it is 'the expression of the self'.<sup>1</sup> This does not mean that Morgenthau overlooks institutionally created meaning impositions. Nevertheless, his main concern regards the individually created meaning impositions, which shape and transform an ever-changing and dynamic social world. What is peculiar to humans, according to Morgenthau, is that, by virtue of one of their nature's features, they continuously

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Sean Molloy for this formulation, articulated at the workshop 'Rethinking the Realist Tradition', Limerick, 24 November 2007.

engage in attempts not only to create their own interpretations, but also to impose them upon their fellow men – and, in this context, Morgenthau often points to the unilateral imposition which characterises a power relationship (Morgenthau 1962c, p. 194). For Morgenthau, power is not primarily materialistic but ideational. The specific nature of Morgenthau's conceptualization of power stems from this very commitment to an ideational vision of power, in which fight for meaning imposition constitutes a fascinating phenomenon, which surfaces after the weakening of universal values. Man's power resides in the success of imposing his interpretation, and the human creative capacities are thus channelled into a continuous effort, performed by each man, for imposing 'his' meaning, his particular position, not by virtue of physical force, but of 'the force of the mind'.

Morgenthau is careful to maintain a well-known Nietzschean distinction. Just as for his intellectual mentor, in his 'last period' stances, self-preservation was 'only one of the indirect and most frequent consequences' of the living thing's desire 'to vent its strength' (Nietzsche 1990, p. 44), for Morgenthau, humans' lust for power 'concerns itself not with the individual's survival, but with his position among his fellows once his survival has been secured' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 165). Furthermore, Morgenthau mirrors the Nietzschean account on the greed for power's area of manifestation: in Morgenthau's view on the performance of the craving for power in the social realm, there is no action 'which would not contain at least a trace of this desire' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 166). As emphasised earlier, here it is obvious that the view according to which Morgenthau's concept of 'power' narrowly applies to the field of politics is mistaken. As Petersen notes, it 'applies to the very constitution of our being, that underlies and seeks to make intelligible realms of knowledge, meaning, and morals – good and evil, truth and falseness' (Petersen 1999, pp. 100-1).

Nietzsche's 'will to power' manifests itself in offering reinterpretations of the world, as Nehamas puts it, 'the greatest means for change, for establishing new conditions and creating new values' (Nehamas 1985, pp. 97, 98) – and throughout them, new meanings. For Nietzsche, 'to impose upon becoming the character of being' stands as the 'supreme will to power' (Nietzsche 1968, p. 330) – and the latter assertion is interpreted by Morgenthau precisely as above, as representing one's striving to make his/her own created meaning prevail. It is this Nietzschean approach to power, focusing upon the possibility of human agency in a historical world (see Warren 1985, p. 183), upon creation as interpretation, and upon struggling for meaning imposition that forms the core of Morgenthau's theory, according to this thesis. The present interpretation therefore suggests that in Morgenthau's world, just like in Nietzsche's, 'what determines your rank is the quantum of power you are' (Nietzsche 1968, p. 457), and the individuals' awareness of this fact intensifies their appetite for such a form of domination. By virtue of one of his nature's features, Morgenthau's human being is pictured as continuously engaged in a quest for acquiring more and more power - interpreted as man's engagement in a fight to impose the meaning/values that he has created, upon the others.

In Morgenthau's view, humans' 'lust for power' is endowed with a limitless character. In *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*, he writes that while man's vital needs 'are capable of satisfaction', the lust for power 'would be satisfied only if the last man became an object of his domination, there being nobody above or beside him' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 165). Taking all these into account, Morgenthau maintains, to deny the lust for power would mean to deny 'the very condition of human existence in this world' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 172). As Morgenthau asserts further, when comparing man's lust for power with his inherent selfishness,

There is in selfishness an element of rationality presented by the natural limitation of the end, which is lacking in the will to power. (...) The selfishness of man has limits; his will to power has none (Morgenthau 1947, p. 166).

As Morgenthau argues in some of his other works, power tries to break down the barrier of individuality (Morgenthau 1962c, p. 192). Moreover, when the imposition is successful, it 'negates the freedom of the individuals over whom it is exercised' (Morgenthau 1950, p. 516). A similar vision of man's unlimited lust for power is endorsed by Morgenthau in a much commented upon essay called 'Love and Power'. As mentioned briefly earlier, Morgenthau emphasises that 'what man cannot achieve for any length of time through love, he tried to achieve through power: to fulfil himself, to make himself whole by overcoming his loneliness, his isolation' (Morgenthau 1970, p. 8). As Morgenthau tells us further, 'the heights of the master's power signal the depths of his despair', and the acquisition of power naturally 'begets the desire for more, for the more men the master holds bound to his will, the more he is aware of his loneliness' (Morgenthau 1970, pp. 194-5).

Morgenthau thus argues that humans always want more power. Equally important to him, however, is the fact that this desire is very likely to trigger catastrophic outcomes. Mirroring Nietzsche's interpretation, Morgenthau argues that the human affirmation of power carries within it a highly destructive potential – see Nietzsche's assessments, for whom power was 'evil' (quoted in Kaufmann 1974, p. 180), and whose 'demon' (quoted in Kaufmann 1957, p. 197) humans could not escape. Within this context, the 'evil of power', and what Morgenthau calls 'the tragic element in life' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 176), are introduced and discussed.



In Morgenthau's account, the fight over power/meaning imposition can easily generate destruction and tragedy. Power and tragedy are interrelated, and the exercise of the former leads to the latter when power escapes humans' control (and here, once again, one notices the metaphysical character of power, as interpreted by Morgenthau). What Morgenthau calls the 'tragic meaning' of existence, and also its 'irrationality' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 174), stem from man's nature itself, from its characteristics - more precisely, from the human limitations exhibited in dealing with the lust for power. Here there is a double tragedy however: one originating from a gap between longings and the condition in which man finds itself; another which stems from the unintentional outcomes brought about by human practice.

Tragedy is a characteristic of human life to which Morgenthau devotes significant attention. As he emphasises in a letter to Michael Oakeshott dated 22 May 1948, 'I would not for a moment admit that tragedy is a category of art and not of life (...). Man is tragic because he cannot do what he ought to do. That contrast between duty and ability is a quality of existence, not a creation of art' (Morgenthau Papers, Box 44, page 2). At this point, the positive, creation-affirming potentialities, provided by 'the death of God', seem to be called into question by an evil coming from within the human individuals, nourished by their inherent limitations.

Nietzsche once warned his readers that 'whoever... wants to gain the consciousness of power will use any means' (Nietzsche quoted in Kaufmann 1954, p. 193). Mirroring his mentor's view, Morgenthau passionately discusses the issue of power's 'demon' and 'evil'. By doing this, he locates himself within a Nietzschean milieu, in which the perils and possibilities stirred by the death of God are problematized, in a search for a viable solution likely to foster man's creativity, while also imposing certain boundaries to it. In Morgenthau's view, expressed in

*Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*, the human lust for power easily escapes our control, it generates evil, and shapes 'an evil world' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 173), where 'even the action which approximates complete goodness... partakes paradoxically of evil' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 165). In this inescapable desire for power, contained within our nature, we can localise 'the element of corruption and of sin' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 167). As Morgenthau asserts bleakly, 'there is no escape from the evil of power, regardless of what one does' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 172), and 'corruption through power' makes us all sinners: 'as soon as we leave the realm of our thoughts and aspirations, we are inevitably involved in sin and guilt. (...) Whenever we act with reference to our fellow men, we must sin' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 172).

In the first volume of his collection of essays published in 1962, Morgenthau re-emphasises these ideas, and argues that man 'cannot help sinning' when he acts in relation to his fellow men: he 'may be able to minimise that sinfulness of social action, but he cannot escape it, for no social action can be completely free of the taint of egotism which, as selfishness, pride, or self-deception, seeks for the actor more than is his due' (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 319). Within his discussion of the evils of power, Morgenthau also emphasises that man's aspiration for power over men denies what is the core of Judeo-Christian morality, namely respect for man as an end in himself: the power relation 'is the very denial of that respect; for it seeks to use man as means to the end of another man' (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 319). In Morgenthau's account, 'it is the very function of Christian ethics to call upon man to comply with a code of moral conduct with which, by virtue of his nature, he cannot comply', which is 'both unattainable and approachable' (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 375). Morgenthau implies that most humans try to escape the conflict 'between what is demanded of us

and what we can do', for to face that conflict 'places an intolerable burden either upon our actions or our consciences' (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 375).

Moreover, in *Science: Servant or Master?*, Morgenthau continues arguing along this line of thinking, and he maintains that humans' will to power interposes itself between the will to live and the means to that end (see Morgenthau 1972, pp. 31-2), and that it orients action toward the achievement of its own end – that is, 'the accumulation, preservation, and demonstration of power' (Morgenthau 1972, p. 32). As Morgenthau tells us further, 'that will to power not only takes the destruction of human life in its stride as a means to that end, but it is predicated upon it' (Morgenthau 1972, p. 32).

In Morgenthau's view, the lust for power's 'evil' is both intentional and unintentional, it is nourished by humans' employment of malefic means, but also by their inability to envisage the consequences of their actions, directed towards meaning imposition. Once again, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics* and *Science: Servant or Master?* offer us valuable insights on Morgenthau's position on the topic. In the former, Morgenthau writes that the human intellect 'is unable to calculate and to control completely' such consequences (Morgenthau 1947, p. 162). Men cannot master their innermost evil accordingly, they cannot 'domesticate' its ever expanding claims, and, despite their initial intentions - 'generally good' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 161) - they are often responsible for the unfolding of events which bring about tragic, destructive consequences. Man's fate seems to be sealed:

Suspended between his spiritual destiny which he cannot fulfil and his animal nature in which he cannot remain, he is forever condemned to experience the

contrast between the longings of his mind and his actual condition as his personal, eminently human tragedy (Morgenthau 1947, p. 188).

Meanwhile, in *Science: Servant or Master?*, Morgenthau argues that the tragic stands as the essence of humans' suffering, and it is interpreted as 'consciousness of the insufficiency of one's existence' (Morgenthau 1972, p. 30) – that is, of the limitations outlined above. According to Morgenthau, the awareness of the limitations demonstrated in dealing with the lust for power intensifies man's suffering: 'because he suffers he longs for more consciousness, and the more consciousness the more he must suffer' (Morgenthau 1972, p. 30).

As mentioned in the previous section, in opposition to many assessments of Morgenthau's portrait of human nature, a strong case can be made that it actually contains two facets, which 'help' it to never turn black completely. In Morgenthau's portrait of human nature we can perceive a second facet, of overcoming through creation and mastering. This thesis suggests that, in Morgenthau's interpretation of man's condition, one can also see the Nietzschean theme of overcoming. This is attained by humans who have the awareness of the destruction likely to be brought by their lust for power, and who also succeed in mastering it. From the same struggle for power can, therefore, also spring hope and re-enchantment, and the 'rejuvenation' of the age - a 'task of destruction' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 15) - is therefore finalised by constructive means.

As Morgenthau implies, through mastering the lust for power, through employing power responsibly, man's actions may account not only for mere destruction, but for a destruction which builds the path towards construction and transcendence. Thus, in

his account, power can cut in different ways, and this ambivalence of power makes its analysis replete with difficulties.

After analysing the 'creature' facet of Morgenthau's account of the human, we turn now to the development of the argument concerning the positive, constructive part of Morgenthau's theory. The next section will show that in Morgenthau's sophisticated account of man as creator one can perceive Nietzsche's 'shadow', but also Max Weber's.

### **3.3 Man as Creator: the Issue of Responsibility**

According to a recent assessment performed by Benjamin Mollov, the main transcendent elements present in Morgenthau's thought are: morality in politics and statecraft, the responsibility of the intellectual to speak truth to power, the importance of philosophy to Morgenthau's approach, and Morgenthau's sustained emphasis upon the spiritual forces in man and politics (Mollov 2002, p. 22). For Mollov, these features support an assertion which only recently has started to gain ground: 'despite his image as a *Realpolitik* thinker, Morgenthau throughout his career grappled with moral, philosophic and spiritual issues' (Mollov 2002, pp. 31, 203). The present thesis agrees with these assumptions, but it also attempts to go beyond them, and to portray Morgenthau as the proponent of an individualist ethical theory which addresses the break up of universal values in order to provide a solution likely to support order and re-enchantment. This section investigates some of the transcendent elements which make up the 'constructive part' of Morgenthau's theory. A more detailed analysis will be made in chapters 4 and 5, which will address Morgenthau's political theory in particular.

As revealed by Mollov, during one of his classes held at the University of Chicago at the beginning of his US academic career, Morgenthau asserted that there is one thing which distinguishes man from all other living beings: the fact that man

‘aspires beyond himself’, that he has the drive ‘to transcend one’s own natural limits and to become more than one is by nature’ (Mollov 2002, p. 50). As Morgenthau mentions in his first book published in the United States, this is indeed the significance of man’s *aristeia*, of his ‘heroic struggle to be and to be more than he is and to know that he is and can be more than he is’ (Morgenthau 1947, p. 189). ‘A straw on the waves of that ocean which is the social world’ (Morgenthau 1947, p. 189), the human individual never stops longing for it. In a remarkable paragraph, Morgenthau pictures a battlefield, where the human being fights ‘with the forces of nature, his fellow-men’s lust for power, and the corruption of his own soul’ (Morgenthau 1947, pp. 189-90). In Morgenthau’s vision, the individual partakes in this confrontation as an authentic hero, his hopes being nourished by a symbolic light, ‘never extinguished’. He is a man by virtue of his creative, constructive capabilities and last but not least, his reason. Here it is important to point out that Morgenthau’s stance regarding reason, as revealed in this paragraph, does not represent a departure from his criticism of the ‘glorification’ of reason, outlined in section 3.2. In the paragraph below, Morgenthau perceives human reason as placed in the service of creation, and he consequently endows the concept with a positive connotation, whereas in the case discussed in section 3.1, he refers to a specific application of reason, namely to that embodied by modern science:

Above this struggle, never ended and never decided in the perpetual chance of victory and defeat, of life and death, a flame burns and a light shines (...): the reason of man, creating and through this creation illumining (...) the symbol of man himself, of what he is and of what he wants to be, of his weakness and of his

strength, of his freedom and of his subjection, of his misery and of his grandeur (Morgenthau 1947, p. 190).

Moreover, in an article published in 1950, while witnessing the Cold War unfolding, and also the behaviourist revolution (which some of his colleagues at the University of Chicago were key proponents of), Morgenthau sought to raise awareness about the phenomenon of power in international relations, and he expressed his fears regarding the 'evil of power'. An important distinction spelled out by Morgenthau is that between what he calls 'general evils', which 'flow from the ubiquity of the lust for power' and, hence, are 'beyond remedy by human effort', and 'specific evils' (Morgenthau 1950, p. 516). The latter are those which result from concrete historical circumstances and which can be rectified, according to Morgenthau: they are 'subject to correction by the processes of history, supported by conscious human effort' (Morgenthau 1950, p. 516). In Morgenthau's account, what is needed in this corrective endeavour, first of all, is the grasping of the true, 'eternal laws by which man moves in the social world' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 187). Here it is not Morgenthau's intention to refer to laws which have been determined by scientific means. By 'eternal laws', Morgenthau implies that there are some human characteristics - such as the lust for power, and the evil generated by it - that a superior character must be aware of, in order to address them straight away, and to be able to master them properly. Such wisdom belongs to an exceptional individual, who correctly assesses 'the distribution and relative strength of opposing forces', fighting in their lust for meaning imposition, and who anticipates 'the emerging pattern of new constellations' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 187). As Morgenthau tells his readers in *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*, this individual is 'the true realist', who



‘does justice to the nature of things’ (Morgenthau 1947, p. 187). Because what he experiences stands as ‘the common lot of mankind’, he represents ‘the prototype of social man himself’ (Morgenthau 1947, p. 188); nevertheless, throughout overcoming his nature’s evils and, in the end, his overall condition, he represents humanity in its superior embodiment: as Morgenthau puts this, ‘the achievement of the wisdom by which insecurity is understood and sometimes mastered is the fulfilment of human possibilities’ (Morgenthau 1947, p. 189).

Morgenthau is particularly interested to analyse this superior character as he appears on the international political stage, and not as a prototype of human beings in general. Consequently, the remaining part of this section will tackle the concept briefly, the detailed analysis being intended to develop in chapters 4 and 5.

In the international political realm, the collapse of the ‘common roof of shared values and universal standards of action’ (Morgenthau 1949, p. 269), namely of a moral realm composed of Christian, cosmopolitan, and humanitarian elements (Morgenthau 1949, p. 191), has led to a relativism which Morgenthau is aware of, and which he often points to throughout his career, as we have already seen. The mission to be attained by Morgenthau’s superior individuals in a realm which is so difficult to master, proves not to be an easy one, and Morgenthau emphasises this at various points in his career. As Morgenthau asserts in *Politics among Nations*, the struggle over power’s amplitude is outstanding - it is a struggle ‘universal in time and space’ (Morgenthau 1949, p. 16). Meanwhile, in *Science: Servant or Master?*, he argues that power over men represents this struggle’s ‘ultimate standard’ (Morgenthau 1972, p. 46). The subtle and complex struggle for the minds of men exhibits instability and diversity, and individuals’ actions directed towards imposing their particular interpretations, may generate an outstanding destructiveness. Because

of these threats, the superior character's task appears to Morgenthau to be more important than ever. He argues that in order to be deemed superior, an actor must possess wisdom, which he defines as 'the gift to grasp intuitively the quality of diverse interests and power in the present and future, and the impact of different actions upon them' (Morgenthau 1972, p. 45). This is not a skill which can be learned: it is 'a gift of nature, like the gift of artistic creativity, or literary style, or eloquence, or force of personality' (Morgenthau 1972, p. 45). Morgenthau's concept of superior leadership, as it applies to the field of politics, will be analysed in chapters 4 and 5.

Morgenthau argues that, in such an age, a genuinely thoughtful and responsible statesman can still appear, and he can create 'a new society out of his knowledge of the nature of man' (Morgenthau 1947, pp. 187-8). Endowed with a crucial role in 'domesticating' the all encompassing fight over power and 'the enduring presence of evil' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 172), annihilating those many possible negative outcomes, Morgenthau's superior character impresses with his wisdom, calmness and 'pathos of distance'. As will be shown in chapters 4 and 5, while partaking with the Nietzschean symbol of the *Übermensch*, Morgenthau's superior actor also echoes Weber's politicised hero, who masters 'the destructiveness of power politics' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 16) throughout acting with an eye to consequences.

Nietzsche developed the issue of responsibility in his *On the Genealogy of Morals*, this notion presupposing that man must 'think in terms of causality, to see and anticipate from afar, to posit ends and means with certainty, to be able... to reckon and calculate' (Nietzsche 1996, p. 40). Nietzsche's position on responsibility was later 'politicised' by Max Weber (for a lengthy discussion on this topic, see Horowitz and Maley 1994), according to whom, by employing an the ethics of

responsibility, 'one has to give an account of the foreseeable results of one's actions' (Weber in Gerth and Wright Mills 1948, p. 120). As we will see in the following chapters, Morgenthau picks up his mentors' views on the superior human individual, especially within its Weberian, political formulation.

Only 'philosophers, artists, and saints' are 'truly human beings and no-longer animals', Nietzsche once asserted (quoted in Kaufmann 1974, p. 312). In projecting his superior hero, Morgenthau appears to follow this other assumption from Nietzsche. Morgenthau's statesman has a good knowledge of human nature's essence. Furthermore, he has 'a special moral responsibility to act (...) in accordance with the rules of the political art' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 159), and his successful political action also echoes a well-known Weberian formulation: it is the 'art of the possible' (Weber 1948, pp. 23-4). The artistic, creative skills exhibited by this superior character can succeed in an ocean of evil power, and therefore, their importance should never be underestimated: as argued by Morgenthau, the social world 'yields only to that intricate combination of moral and material pressures which the art of the statesman creates and maintains' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 16). Throughout his neverending battle with the conflicting forces of the social field, throughout the struggle with his own limitations, with gaining self-knowledge, in order to master his inherent evil, and the others', the statesman becomes the symbol of man fulfilling his destiny:

To act successfully, that is, according to the rules of the political *art*, is political wisdom. To know with despair that the political act is inevitably evil, and to act nevertheless, is moral courage. To choose among several expedient actions the least evil one is moral judgment. In the combination of political wisdom, moral

courage, and moral judgment, man reconciles his political nature with his moral destiny (Morgenthau 1947, p. 173).

‘Know thyself; you will then know the others’ inner essence, “tame” your common inclination towards evil, and construct’ – this seems to be Morgenthau’s message. He tries to raise awareness that, instead of just passively waiting for a prophet to redeem the world, in such an era, humans can engage in a thoroughgoing act of self-reflection, and, become aware of their nature and its limitations - more precisely, of their lust for power’s evil essence - they can begin their own accomplished overcoming. It is here that we can see most clearly that Morgenthau’s superior hero resembles the Nietzschean symbol of the *Übermensch* – as a provider of ‘the meaning of the earth’ (Nietzsche quoted in Kaufmann 1954, p. 125), and an expression of ‘what man will become when he conquers himself’ (Jaspers 1965, p. 128), namely his nature’s passionate longing for power.

This chapter has focused on Morgenthau’s metaphysics, with an emphasis on the significance of the ‘death of God’ diagnosis for his metaphysics, and for the development of his concern with the issues of meaning and disenchantment. The interpretation has thus moved away from materialistic readings of Morgenthau in order to point to the foundational assumptions in Morgenthau’s account, and to his views regarding the multi-perspectival character of truth and the multiplicity of meanings and value interpretations. It has argued that Morgenthau employs a nuanced and rich understanding of the power phenomena, which points to power as less as a mere influence and more as a creative act, in a league of its own. Morgenthau is fascinated with power as a creative value in itself, as interpretation and meaning imposition, and he sees the power related phenomena as forming a

unity in multiplicity. This thesis maintains that following a well-known Nietzschean dictum, Morgenthau's superior characters do destroy, but they destroy 'only as creators' (Nietzsche 1954, p. 140). In the end their actions, which spring from an outstanding effort to overcome the malefic inevitabilities contained within men's nature, are clearly perceived as positive, and they account for what we can call – without creating a contradiction in terms - 'positive destruction'. The difference between 'good' and 'bad' destruction stems from the actor's pondering over the consequences, and therefore from his acting responsibly: 'good' destruction is that performed with an awareness of the consequences likely to follow from that particular action. Throughout the change of values which they perform, it is from these superior heroes that men's long awaited meaning springs, since 'what is good and evil *no one knows yet*, unless it be he who creates. He... creates man's goal and gives the earth its meaning' (Nietzsche 1954, p. 308).

The next chapter will consider the broadening out of the scope of Morgenthau's metaphysical assumptions, by examining the translation of his metaphysics into an interpretation of the political. It will show that Morgenthau's vision focuses on developments such as the disenchantment of politics, which in his view is imperative to address after the death of universal values. Morgenthau perceives politics to be a realm characterised by intrinsic plurality, dynamic reinterpretations and conflictual meanings, and he criticises disenchantment, pointing to the meaninglessness of politics triggered by rationalization. The chapter will also shed light on Morgenthau's account of the political embodiment of a constructive force. The second part of the chapter will show that Morgenthau's superior hero is aware of the evil of political action, and instead of becoming the victim of a rationalization which

reduces his creative potentialities, he responsibly affirms his individuality on the political stage, and counteracts disenchantment.

#### **4. The Disenchantment of Politics, and Morgenthau's Leadership**

##### **Theory**

By 1964, Hans Morgenthau regarded the opportunities offered by the social and political order more optimistically. When asked about his earlier expressed disillusion, he replied ('Sum and Substance' interview, Morgenthau papers, Box 172, p. 5): 'I'm through with being disillusioned. I try now to come to terms with the positive values which human nature and human life, social and political life, contain'. At that time, Morgenthau was trying to raise his contemporaries' awareness on the 'death of God', and the perils of technological advancement; at the same time however, his earlier revolt against disenchantment was tempered by the belief that mankind could really use the new potentialities provided by modern technology to its advantage, instead of its destruction (see 5<sup>th</sup> Lecture at the Oriental Institute, 7 April 1950, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 23). Despite this softening of vision, the foundational assumptions embedded in Morgenthau's theory – the 'death of God', the subsequent advent of nihilism and disenchantment, and the fight over power interpreted as meaning imposition – will endure in his account until the very end. Towards the end of his career, in *Science: Servant or Master?*, Morgenthau exposes modern man's anxieties and disappointment with his existence, and argues that many dangers are still to be counteracted. In a familiar stance, he criticizes science's

disenchantment of human life, and its propensity for duplicity: 'the same technologies produce medicines and poison gas, machines and weapons, nuclear energy and nuclear bombs' (Morgenthau 1972, p. 28).

The previous chapter explored Morgenthau's metaphysics. Now it is time to examine the way in which Morgenthau's diagnosis translates into an understanding of politics, and to focus on this in more detail. The present chapter shows that the Nietzschean and Weberian dimensions of Morgenthau's philosophical outlook translate into a theory which emphasises politics' inner dynamics and uniqueness, the propensity for political creation - understood as meaning imposition - but also the actor's responsibilities in this regard.

In this interpretation, Morgenthau's analysis proceeds along two axes: one is constituted by the triad truth – meaning - the death of God, the other by the triad power – politics – the disenchantment of politics. Lang rightly argues that Morgenthau is 'intensely interested in the intersection of ethics and politics' (see Lang 2004, p. 5). Moreover, as this thesis asserts, Morgenthau's political theory is built upon an acknowledgment of the 'death of God' – of an external moral reference point, which could guarantee meaning - which has affected the political space, and of the consequences of this 'death' upon this space. In modernity, as interpreted by Morgenthau, humans live and act politically through values, they propagate values which are the end results of laborious interpretative processes. At the same time, a consensus upon values such as truth, justice and equality seem impossible to attain. As Morgenthau puts it in an article published in 1949, no one could give answers to questions regarding these values, which would be more than reflections of his own preconceptions, 'for there are no standards at once concrete and universal enough to provide more than *ex parte* answers to such questions' (Morgenthau 1949a, p. 211).



As Morgenthau maintains years later in another writing which indicates his continuing interest with this topic, the substance of such answers derives not from abstract pronouncements, but from the concrete interests at stake, which 'give concreteness to the abstractions' (Morgenthau 1970, p. 64).

A central feature of Morgenthau's account is his analysis of what we can call the 'disenchantment of politics', as caused by scientific rationalization. Mirroring Weber's methodological assumptions, Morgenthau argues against 'importing' methods which belong to natural sciences into the field of the social sciences. Moreover, he maintains that in recent times, politics has been diminished in its status, and rendered meaningless by attempts to simplify its complex, contingent internal processes. In Morgenthau's account, political scientists do not grasp their field of enquiry properly, engage in meaningless empirical investigation, and avoid values (see Lang 2004, pp. 22, 24). On the political scene, what Morgenthau calls 'the engineer of the revolution' (Morgenthau 1947, pp. 31-2) is just one example of the new type of leader, who has emerged in the aftermath of the rationalist intrusion. This is a leader whose thoughts and actions demonstrate his allegiance to technology, and who, in Morgenthau's view, fails to understand political reality properly – that is, the reality of power and of meaning imposition.

The first section of this chapter examines the issues of perspectivism and a larger form of relativism in the political realm, and the consequences of these positions, as articulated by Morgenthau. In his account, Morgenthau distinguishes between domestic and international politics; however, this distinction will not be problematized in the present section. Section 2 will then focus on Morgenthau's theory of politics, with a special emphasis on the disenchantment which has occurred in this sphere, according to Morgenthau. The examination of the specific

characteristics of the autonomous sphere of thought and action called 'politics' will indicate that for Morgenthau politics after the death of God stands as a dangerous realm, disenchanted by rationalist approaches, plagued by ideological battles and threatened with technological destruction. As this thesis is keen to emphasise, Morgenthau returns to the critique of rationalism throughout his life, with views unchanged. In modernity, human existence and within it, the sphere of politics itself, have been disenchanted, and therefore reduced to calculations which tell us nothing about their intrinsic meaning. This is the meaning assigned in the thesis to the concept of 'the disenchantment of politics'.

In Morgenthau's interpretation of the political, man is the propagator and also the victim of the struggle for power - what Morgenthau calls *animus dominandi*, borrowing the term from St. Augustine. This is a force which from time to time shakes the social order to its foundations, and administers to our consciousness 'that shock of wonderment that is the beginning of a meaningful science of politics' (Morgenthau 1972, p. 31). As Morgenthau adds, 'when he can no longer be sure of himself, incomprehensible even in his familiar appearance', man 'can be saved from despair only by an understanding that portends mastery' (Morgenthau 1972, p. 31). Subsequently, section 3 argues that in Morgenthau's vision, salvation from metaphysical dread and re-enchantment of the (political) world can only come through knowledge. Morgenthau is eager to emphasise that, in the political realm, 'true' knowledge is achieved by 'genuine' political actors who employ power responsibly and are characterised by detachment and prudence.

The chapter will end by drawing attention to what at first glance may look like a contradiction in Morgenthau's theory: while pointing to the perspectivism and relativism which characterise the political realm in the aftermath of the death of God,

Morgenthau also asserts that in international politics, universal moral values which transcend national values must continue to exist. There are sound reasons to argue that this sophisticated position does not necessarily constitute a contradiction, but stems from the way in which Morgenthau interprets the meaning of politics. This topic will be developed in chapter 5.

#### **4.1 Plurality and Perspectivism in the Political Realm**

The previous chapter has provided an analysis of Morgenthau's metaphysics, with an emphasis, amongst other things, on its special understanding of the concept of 'truth'. This section will show that for Morgenthau, the meaning of 'truth' in modernity represents a scholarly concern which permeates both his metaphysics and his political theory, and it will proceed to provide an interpretation of the latter. Morgenthau is aware of the importance of truth in the shaping of power, and consequently, in his theory of the political, these two concepts are interrelated. In the collection of essays *Truth and Power*, Morgenthau expresses his faith 'in the power of truth to move men – and, more importantly, statesmen – to act' (Morgenthau 1970, p. 5). In Morgenthau's account, power 'needs truth to be wise and great', and by the standards of truth, the men of power are ultimately judged (Morgenthau 1970, p. 33). Moreover, Morgenthau argues that the decisive distinction between the intellectual and the politician lies in their orientation toward different ultimate values. Despite this incompatibility, the two worlds are potentially intertwined, 'for truth has a message that is relevant to power, and the very existence of power has a bearing upon the expression and the recognition of truth' (Morgenthau 1970, p. 14).

Morgenthau's 'basic commitment' (Molloy 2004, p. 1) to the discovery of the truth of politics, and to the disentangling of the relationship between truth and power,

is exacerbated by the awareness that the place of truth as a universally valid principle is occupied by a multiplicity of different truths in the aftermath of the death of God. The previous chapter showed that by adopting this position regarding the plurality of truths which characterises modernity, Morgenthau agrees with relativism, as a philosophical orientation which implies that there are many kinds of truth, and that what counts as true in a given context 'depends upon the conventions of particular societies, traditions, scientific paradigms, or modes of discourse' (Nardin 1988, pp. 150-1). Furthermore, Morgenthau's interest in the concept of 'truth' transpires in his diagnosis of political modernity which emphasises perspectivism. As Morgenthau explains in *Science: Servant or Master?*, the individual looks at the political scene from a perspective which is determined by his philosophy, and which he will share with some, but not with others (Morgenthau 1972, p. 31). For Morgenthau, in every truth there is a perspective. As he states his assumption most clearly (albeit in a somewhat informal manner) in one of his unpublished lectures,

One observer may stand at one end of the valley, another at the opposite end (...), still another is on the summit of a mountain, and finally someone stands at its foot, and each one of them sees entirely different things (undated lecture, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 10).

Morgenthau's endorsement of perspectivism and of a certain degree of relativism shows up at various points in his career. A good example arises in his discussion of the meaning of the political scientist's membership of a pluralistic society, such as the US. Here, Morgenthau says, the scholar is simultaneously a member of 'a multiplicity of sectional societies of a religious, political, social, and economic

character, all exerting parallel or contradictory pressures upon him' (Morgenthau 1955, p. 38). As Morgenthau points out, all these groups are 'committed to a particular social "truth"', and the political scientist 'cannot help deviating from one or the other of these "truths" if he does not want to forego his moral commitment to discovering *the* truth of society altogether' (Morgenthau 1955, p. 38), and towards imposing a universalization of values and truth.

Furthermore, in an article written in 1955, Morgenthau maintains that the political scientist's mind is 'moulded' by the society which he observes, and from this it follows that the observer's mind is by its very nature 'unable to see more than part of the truth' (Morgenthau 1955, pp. 445-6). The truth 'which a mind thus socially conditioned is able to grasp is likewise socially conditioned' (Morgenthau 1955, pp. 445-6), and taking into account these observations, Morgenthau concludes that 'the truth of political science is of necessity a partial truth' (Morgenthau 1955, p. 445). As argued by Morgenthau in one of his early lectures held at the University of Chicago,

If you ask what is the truth with regard to a particular problem of foreign affairs and you consult five books written respectively by an American, an Englishman, a Russian, a Frenchman, and a Chinese, you will find you have, if not five different truths, then five formulations of truth, stressing different points of view (Lecture 7, 16 January 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 6).

Meanwhile, in *Science: Servant or Master?* Morgenthau maintains that the political scientist is 'a product' of the society which it is his mission to understand' (Morgenthau 1972, p. 36), and that the influence of the observer's personal

perspective upon the 'truth' must always be taken into account. Consequently, the political theorist has to face two limitations: the limitation of origin, 'which determines the perspective from which he looks at society', and the limitation of purpose, which 'makes him wish to remain a member in good standing of that society, or even to play a leading role in it' (Morgenthau 1972, p. 31).

Morgenthau's commitment to perspectivism and a certain degree of relativism also shows up in his interpretation of some of the political processes which characterise democratic regimes. In a statement before the US Senate Subcommittee on Constitutional Rights, which echoes those of his fellow academic and friend Hannah Arendt, Morgenthau emphasises that democracy is predicated upon a pluralism of persons, political philosophies, and policies, vying for political power (1 March 1973, Morgenthau Papers, Box 107, p. 3). Meanwhile, in a paragraph quoted by Lang, Morgenthau explains that in such a political order, people implicitly endorse a relativistic conception of truth and virtue. As Morgenthau puts it, in a democracy, you believe in your own truth, but you also 'don't deny the possibility that the other side might also have a parcel of truth' (Morgenthau quoted in Lang 2004, p. 37). In Morgenthau's understanding of the democratic phenomena, 'since relativism assumes that there is no absolute truth, at least no absolute truth recognizable or intelligible by man, you have to give all groups within the state an equal chance to prove their truth' (Morgenthau quoted in Lang 2004, p. 37). From Morgenthau's perspective, democratic elections are just one example of this fight over truth, which he is interested in depicting: by means of the electoral process, 'you give the other side a chance to make its claim prevail, and put the different truths that fight with each other to the scrutiny of the electorate' (Morgenthau quoted in Lang 2004, p. 86).

When referring to the international political sphere, which makes up his main area of enquiry and reflection, Morgenthau maintains that here the appeal to moral principles 'has no concrete universal meaning' (Morgenthau 1982, p. 35). To act in this realm means to act in a sphere whose features are very different from the past, which has undergone transformations of an unprecedented novelty and magnitude (Morgenthau 1982, p. 39). Morgenthau emphasises the magnitude of the transformations within the international political scene in writings published at various stages in his career, and his analysis is contextually bounded. As he explains in his 1962 collection of essays published at the height of the Cold War, the international realm has been transformed by three great revolutions in his view: the political revolution, which 'has destroyed the modern pluralistic state system and replaced it with a bipolar world'; the technological revolution, which 'has created the technical means both for the total destruction and the total unification of the world'; last but not least, the moral revolution 'has split the world into two hostile camps, divided not only by political interests but also by political philosophies and ways of life' (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 83).

For Morgenthau however, the fundamental transformation is represented by the collapse of universal norms. As he states in one of his unpublished lectures given in 1946, on the international scene there is no working system of ethics (Lecture 25, 11<sup>th</sup> March 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 10), this ethics is extremely weak and inefficient. No particular interpretation of moral principles is able to prevail, and so you arrive not only at a political and social, but also at a moral anarchy (Lecture 28, 18<sup>th</sup> March 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 4). Morgenthau refines his interpretation a few years later, in *Politics among Nations*, and here he spells out the meaning which he assigns to the notion of the 'death of God' most clearly: in



international politics, the 'death of God' is interpreted by Morgenthau as the 'death' (disintegration) of an international morality 'composed of Christian, cosmopolitan, and humanitarian elements' (Morgenthau 1949, p. 14). Morgenthau does not hide his nostalgic yearning for the way in which, in his view, international relations used to be conducted in the past: where there used to be consensus, now there is moral dissolution. In Morgenthau's account, the 'golden age of isolated normalcy' - and here Morgenthau employs an idealized vision of the past represented by the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries - is gone 'forever' in the realm of international politics, and no effort, however great, and no action, however radical, will bring it back' (Morgenthau 1949, p. 219).

Morgenthau argues that as a consequence of the 'empty transcendent space' referred to earlier, moral principles once endowed with universal meaning such as justice or equality, are now capable of guiding political action 'only to the extent that they have been given concrete content and have been related to political situations by society' (Morgenthau 1972, p. 38). A good example is represented by Morgenthau's interpretation of the means-ends relation. In the aftermath of the 'death of God', following the escalation of perspectivism and relativism, the relation means-ends becomes 'artificial and particular', and open to debates: Morgenthau maintains that one may argue from the point of view of a particular political philosophy, but one 'cannot prove from the point of view of universal and objective ethical standards that the good of the end ought to prevail over the evil of the means' (Morgenthau 1945, p. 8). In Morgenthau's interpretation, what is the end for one group of persons may be used as means by another group, and vice versa. The means-end relation has 'no objectivity', and 'is relative to the social vantage point of the observer' (Morgenthau 1945, p. 8).

The supposed universal and static meaning of the concept of equality is questioned by Morgenthau in a similar manner: as Lang interprets Morgenthau's position on the topic, 'our conception of equality is determined by certain ethical and cultural preconceptions that are subject to change in time' (Lang 2004, p. 44).

In a similar fashion, to Morgenthau the idea of universal and absolute freedom represents a contradiction in terms, since in any given society not everyone can be as free as anyone else, there being differences in the degree of freedom enjoyed. Moreover, as he maintains in an undated manuscript, freedom is not a condition of empirical existence, but of moral existence (undated, Morgenthau Papers, Box 199). Thus, it applies to the moral realm of our being, with all its creative, interpretative qualities. In Morgenthau's view, freedom has two incompatible meanings, which derive from two incompatible positions and perspectives: freedom for the holder of political power signifies the opportunity to exercise political domination, while freedom for the subject means the absence of such domination. Furthermore, the concept of freedom appears ambivalent to Morgenthau. As he suggests in an unpublished version of 'Dilemmas of Freedom', most members of society experience two forms of freedom at the same time: 'the freedom of the many to compete in the marketplace for acceptance of their different truths requires the abrogation of the freedom of one to impose his conception of truth upon all' (undated, Morgenthau Papers, Box 111, p. 2).

Closely related to Morgenthau's concept of freedom is that of justice, which bears Nietzschean reminiscences too. Justice, immortality, freedom, power, and love are the poles which in Morgenthau's view attract and thereby shape the thoughts and actions of men. Man can experience the latter three; what he cannot have, says Morgenthau in *Truth and Power*, is the kind and quantity of freedom, power, and

love he would like to have (Morgenthau 1970, p. 61). With justice, as with immortality, it is different: 'the question here is whether man can have it at all' (Morgenthau 1970, p. 61). Even if assuming the reality of justice, men are incapable of realising it: in Morgenthau's harsh conclusion, men are too ignorant, too selfish, and too poor to do what justice demands of them (Morgenthau 1970, p. 67).

A very important assumption within Morgenthau's account concerns the non-existence of a concept of justice with a universal meaning. Morgenthau argues that justice is relative, and that instead of 'justice' one finds interests, which represent dividing universals: 'powerful and weak alike now tend to think of justice as being synonymous with personal interests' (see Morgenthau 1970, pp. 61, 62). In Morgenthau's view, man equates 'with a vengeance' his vantage point and justice (Morgenthau 1970, p. 65), and all men look at the world, and judge it, from the vantage point of their interests (Morgenthau 1970, p. 64). In Morgenthau's view, from an empirical perspective, following the death of God, there are as many conceptions of justice as there are vantage points, and 'the absolute majesty of justice dissolves into the relativity of so many interests and points of view' (Morgenthau 1970, p. 64). Moreover, turning Kant's categorical imperative upside down, men take for granted, says Morgenthau, that the standards of judgment and action produced by the peculiarities of their perspective can serve as universal laws for all mankind' (Morgenthau 1970, p. 64) – and here, once again, the spectre of meaning imposition enters the picture. In the international political sphere, there is no society above national societies to comprehend them all, and from this Morgenthau concludes in *Politics among Nations* that justice among nations 'has no concrete universal meaning' (Morgenthau 1949, p. 211).

A similar vision informs Morgenthau's interpretation of human rights, as a concept endowed by some with universal acceptance. Such an understanding of human rights is criticised by Morgenthau on the basis of the same perspectivist and relativist principles, and he responds to the US proponents of this meaning of human rights. As Morgenthau contends in his famous 1979 Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs lecture, human rights 'are filtered through the intermediary of historic and social circumstances, which will lead to different results in different times and under different circumstances' (Morgenthau 1979, p. 15). Subsequently, Morgenthau objects to the concept of rights, and uses instead the formulation 'basic interests', whose expression may vary at different times and in different places (Morgenthau 1979, p. 15). As he states, the attempt to impose upon the rest of the world the respect for human rights is a daring and ignorant endeavour, throughout which an abstract principle is 'presented to the rest of mankind not for imitation, but for acceptance' (Morgenthau 1979, p. 5). By contrast to these tendencies, according to Morgenthau, diversity must be preserved and respect for it strengthened.

As seen above, Morgenthau problematizes the existence of concepts endowed with a universal meaning in politics, both domestic and international, and raises awareness on the demise of international morality in the political realm. Most importantly, in Morgenthau's account, the rise of nationalism represents one of the decisive phenomena which have brought about the collapse of the international society within which the international morality had operated.

The 'mechanics' behind nationalism's manifestation in the international realm is simple to Morgenthau: as he puts it in *Politics among Nations*, since, within the national community, 'only a relatively small group permanently yields power over great numbers of people' (Morgenthau 1949, p. 74), the 'powerless' experience an

overwhelming frustration, and they 'project those unsatisfied aspirations unto the international scene' – and this unsatisfied lust for power forms the essence of nationalism in Morgenthau's account (Morgenthau 1949, p. 74). Surprisingly for Morgenthau, the identification with the nation is not condemned, but highly regarded by modern society, which 'encourages and glorifies' the population's tendencies 'to identify itself with the nation's struggle for power on the international scene' (Morgenthau 1949, p. 75). The moral principles which are invoked in international affairs are after the death of God 'completely distorted in practical application by the national egotisms of the individual nations', and they turn into ideologies (Lecture 28, 18 March 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 2). On the international scene, the multiplicity of nations maintains the competition for meaning imposition alive, and the disintegration of the international morality mentioned above is thus continued, until one side wins and imposes a certain morality for a while. As Morgenthau maintains in one of his unpublished lectures dated 18<sup>th</sup> March 1946, this confrontation is infinitely subtle, and it is driven by the passionate desire to attain the goal of meaning imposition: 'this is not a struggle between good and evil, truth and falsehood, but of power with power' (Lecture 28, 18 March 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 3).

Morgenthau's distaste for nationalism is obvious. Nationalism – 'this *nervrose nationale*' (Nietzsche quoted in Strong 2000, p. 210) - provides 'an artificial and "overly modest" meaning for life' (Nietzsche quoted in Strong 2000, p. 210). To Morgenthau, it is an 'abstraction' (Morgenthau 1949, p. 73), which moreover encourages conformism, and thus denies the manifestation of individuals' creative powers. What is more dangerous is that, while looking for the international success of a particular nation's interpretation of reality, people embrace what Morgenthau

calls the 'new morality of nationalism', which is 'not universalistic and humanitarian, but particularistic and exclusive' (Morgenthau 1949, pp. 190, 191). Individuals' outstanding feelings of insecurity and frustration have given rise to an increased desire for compensatory identification with the collective national aspirations for power' (Morgenthau 1949, p. 268), and to what Morgenthau calls 'nationalistic universalism', for whom the nation is 'the starting point of a universal mission, whose ultimate goal reaches the confines of the political world' (Morgenthau 1949, p. 269). At present, Morgenthau asserts in *Politics among Nations*, on the international scene, such aspirations are 'supported by virtually total populations, with an unqualified dedication and intensity of feeling' (Morgenthau 1949, p. 79), exposing 'the fervor of a secular religion' (Morgenthau 1949, p. 77), and the aura of a prophetic mission:

Carrying their idols before them, the nationalistic masses of our time meet in the international arena, each group convinced that it... does for humanity what it seems to do for itself, and that it fulfils a sacred mission ordained by providence.... Little do they know that they meet under an empty sky from which the gods have departed (Morgenthau 1949, p. 196).

Morgenthau's assessment of the modern state is equally critical, and it echoes the Nietzschean Zarathustra's words. 'The new idol', the 'coldest of all cold monsters', God's fake 'ordering finger', the place 'where the slow suicide of all is called "life"' (Nietzsche 1968, pp. 160, 161, 162) - this is the way in which Nietzsche describes the state, by means of his prophet's voice. In his turn, Morgenthau perceives it as a 'legal fiction' and a 'mortal God', and by employing this latter

formulation, Morgenthau emphasises the state's importance in the modern age: 'for an age that believes no longer in an immortal God, the state becomes the only God there is' (Morgenthau 1949, p. 169). In Morgenthau's account, the modern nation-state has become in the secular sphere 'the most exalted object of loyalty on the part of the individual, and at the same time the most effective organization for the exercise of power over the individual' (Morgenthau 1949, p. 169). Morgenthau notes that 'while society puts liabilities upon aspirations for individual power, it places contributions to the collective power of the state at the top of the hierarchy of values' (Morgenthau 1949, p. 169). It is clear that for both Nietzsche and Morgenthau therefore, the modern state turns into a structure which suppresses agency's manifestation, draining 'the potential sources from which creation of new values could come' (Strong 2000, p. 205), and humans become prisoners within its cage. In this way, the state exercises not only the well-known 'monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory' (Weber 1948, p. 78), but also a monopoly of meaning, which Morgenthau is keen to criticize (this does not mean, however, that Morgenthau is anti-statist and agrees with the withering away of the state, or that he encourages unbound, unregulated action/creation. This point will be addressed in the thesis later on). Furthermore, the state exhibits a false, pseudo-encouragement of individuals' affirmation, throughout a process empty of substance, of authenticity: as one of Nietzsche's interpreters puts it, in reality, 'there is no creating will behind it, no public arena except the shadow of a dead God' (Strong 2000, p. 205).

Having outlined Morgenthau's foundational commitments to perspectivism and to a larger form of relativism (which are pivotal for the development of his political theory), and also his position on concepts such as truth, justice and equality, we now turn to the articulation of his vision of politics and political power. Section 4.2 will

provide an analysis of the specific nature of politics, with an emphasis on its dynamic, confrontational but also creative nature. While praising politics as the manifestation of creative individual forces, Morgenthau is also aware of the individual's fight for meaning imposition, with both its negative and positive likely outcomes. In *Truth and Power*, Morgenthau claims that 'we take it for granted that the standards of judgment and action produced by the peculiarities of our perspective can serve as universal laws for all mankind' (Morgenthau 1970, p. 64). 'It is not so much morality which limits individual interests, but the individual interests which identify themselves with morality', Morgenthau maintains (Morgenthau 1970, p. 69). Morgenthau holds to a universal core of values in order to avoid the likely destructive outcomes of the struggle for power, and this makes up a position which will be analysed in section 4.3 and then in chapter 5 in more detail.



## **4.2 On Politics as a Quest for Power, and the Perils of**

### **Disenchantment**

In an interview given in 1964, Hans Morgenthau argues that politics ‘has really not the aim to make people better, or to alleviate their pain or their misery’ (‘Sum and Substance’, Morgenthau papers, Box 172, p. 2). On the contrary, it has ‘the aim of maintaining or increasing or destroying, as the case may be, the power of one man or one group of men as over the power of another man or of another group of men’ (‘Sum and Substance’ interview, Morgenthau Papers, Box 172, p. 2). This is Morgenthau’s account made public in the same discussion in which he expressed his optimism regarding the potentialities offered by modernity’s political realm. For Morgenthau politics can only be about power, understood as a fierce contest for the imposition of interpretations among creative and dynamic actors. Morgenthau adds in the discussion referred to above that the problem and ‘secret’ of politics consists in finding a balance between freedom and order. Taking into account the diversity of contexts and the unpredictability of developments within the political sphere, the solution to this problem is ‘always dynamic and at the same time precarious’. It follows then, that the task of politics is ‘never ended’ (‘Sum and Substance’ interview, Morgenthau Papers, Box 172, p. 2).

Following the Nietzschean vision of the will to power, Morgenthau emphasises the unpredictability, fluctuating and pervasive quality of the concept. In one of his early, unpublished lectures, he maintains that power is never anything stable, anything which is defined once and for all, but is in constant flux, and it must always be conceived in relative terms (see Lecture 7, 16 January 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 8). Meanwhile, in an article published in 1955, Morgenthau emphasises that power is the very 'life blood of the action', and the struggle for power - 'elemental, undisguised, and all-pervading' (Morgenthau 1955, p. 454) - stands as a phenomenon which makes up a unity in multiplicity. Last but not least, in Morgenthau's view, expressed in *The Decline of Democratic Politics*, the phenomenon of power and the configurations to which it gives rise play 'an important, yet largely neglected, part in all social life' (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 50).

The vision of power which transpires is that of an entity which is always changing, and whose agents are engaged in unpredictable actions, with uncertain outcomes. For Morgenthau, politics is an open question, dynamic and with a life of its own, and it can endow human existence with significance. Following the death of God, Morgenthau maintains, men must seek to actively participate in politics, to make decisive choices, their involvement and actions being likely to save them from the pitfalls of bureaucratization. Morgenthau is keen to criticise the scientific embodiment of reason for its conception of politics and for its attempts directed towards meaning imposition, which lead to the disenchantment of politics in his view.

Morgenthau brings power to the centre of his theory, and builds his account on a universalist assumption. In Petersen's view, as it was the case with Nietzsche, for Morgenthau, 'the hope of identifying an Archimedean point of incontestable

knowledge and pure identity is a mirage', and Morgenthau's concept of power 'appears to be rooted in an attempt to frame the totality of relations that make up a world at any one time, without reducing them to a single principle' (Petersen 1999, pp. 88-9). Morgenthau explains the need for such a concept in his article 'Power as a Political Concept', in which he emphasises that by making power its central principle, a theory of politics 'does not presume that none but power relations control political action' (Morgenthau 1971a, p. 31). What Morgenthau draws attention to at this point is the theoretical need to establish such a conceptual point of reference. To quote Morgenthau's detailed account of his position, a theory of politics must presume

the need for a central concept which allows the observer to distinguish the field of politics from other social spheres, to orient himself in the maze of empirical phenomena which make up the field of politics, and to establish a measure of rational order within it. A central concept, such as power, then provides a kind of rational outline of politics, a map of the political scene (Morgenthau 1971a, p. 31).

As seen in the previous section, the human individual is always center staged by Morgenthau. In his account, not all action is political but only that which involves human agents who strive to gain power by imposing their particular interpretations upon the others. There are strong grounds indeed for arguing that Morgenthau's is a politics mainly made up by individuals. As Morgenthau states in a relevant article published early in his career, on the political scene 'it is always the individual who acts, either with reference to his own ends alone or with reference to the ends of

others' (Morgenthau 1945, p. 8). Morgenthau argues further that the action of society, of the national, or of any other collectivity, political or otherwise, as such 'has no empirical existence at all'. What empirically exists are always the actions of individuals 'who perform identical or different actions with reference to a common end' (Morgenthau 1945, p. 8). Unsurprisingly then, Morgenthau's definition of political power expressed in *Politics among Nations* points to the human being, and to his nature, as the reference point. Power stands as 'man's control over the minds and actions of other men' (Morgenthau 1949, p. 73), it consists in 'the psychological relations between two minds', giving those who exercise it 'control over certain actions of those over whom it is exercised' (Morgenthau 1949, p. 14). Moreover, as Morgenthau explains in his article *The Evil of Power*, power can be conceived of as 'a quality of a certain individual in his relations with another individual': 'in this sense we can say that A has power over B or that B fears the power of A' (Morgenthau 1950, p. 514). Certain people have enormous power drives, while others have moderate power drives, and others have very little, if any. Despite these differences in degree, there is no difference in kind to Morgenthau.

In Morgenthau's view, one cannot understand politics, and international affairs in particular, 'without being aware always that what is happening on the political, and more particularly on the international, scene is only a particular application of something which is innate in every human being, an application to collectivities of certain elemental motivations which operate in each individual man' (Lecture 7, 16 January 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 9). As he restates this in an unpublished manuscript, 'the nature of politics is linked to the nature of man in its origin, in its substance, and in its immediate goal. We envisage the political as a force inherent in each individual and directed toward other individuals' (Morgenthau

quoted in Frei 2001, p. 198). These assumptions are fundamental to Morgenthau's theory, and he reiterates them at various points in his career: in his first two books published in the US, what Morgenthau calls the 'elemental bio-psychological drives' - 'the drives to live, to propagate, and to dominate' - are common to all men (Morgenthau 1949, p. 17), and politics is rooted in this common lust for power (Morgenthau 1947, p. 16). As Morgenthau often emphasises, 'there can be no actual denial of the lust for power without denying the very conditions of human existence in this world' (Morgenthau 1949, p. 15), since 'there is no social action which would not contain at least a trace of this desire to make one's own person prevail against others' (Morgenthau 1949, p. 17). Meanwhile, in his collection of essays published in 1962, Morgenthau similarly argues that society is a product of human nature, and the drive to dominate manifests itself 'whenever human beings live in social contact with each other' (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 73). Moreover, in the context of his unpublished university lectures, he emphasises that power is always the power of man over man, and the striving and struggle for power is not a phenomenon of the political scene alone, but 'a general phenomenon of human life in society' (Lecture 7, 16 January 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 5). Politics is therefore not so much a separate sphere of practice defined by a particular principle, but one which concerns the intensification of a particular manifestation which exists in all forms of interaction. Man's aspiration for power is not an accident of history, but 'an all-permeating fact which is of the very essence of human existence' (Lecture 7, 16 January 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 10), a universal experience of humanity:

It finds in politics its most extreme and most violent and brutal manifestation, but it is everywhere, hidden behind ideologies, disguised by the conventions of the good society. It is to be found wherever men live together in social groups, and that is everywhere (Lecture 7, 16 January 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 9).

For Morgenthau, the political world encompasses the fight over power, as an intrinsic element of social relations (Lecture 7, 16 January 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 6), diverse in its manifestations and unpredictable in its outcomes: politics makes up 'a universal force inherent in human nature, and necessarily seeking power over other men' (see for example Morgenthau 1972, p. 31). Politics nourishes a permanent struggle, whose immediate goal is power, and the modes of acquiring, maintaining, and demonstrating power 'determine the technique of political action' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 16). For Morgenthau, this struggle is fierce, and it accounts for the brutality exhibited by what he takes to be the facts of political life. The specificity of politics as a sphere of practice resides in this ongoing competition directed towards meaning imposition, and its constituting actors are eager to make their own interpretation 'the truth' for all, adopted and recognised as such. The change of the meaning at stake in the political game is achieved at the end of a demanding battle over power, and the successful meaning imposition exercised by an actor is reflected in the others' following of it. Morgenthau argues that throughout this fierce struggle for meaning imposition, truth becomes a mere function of political power: 'who has the power to say what truth is will make truth' (Lecture 4, 12 April 1962, Morgenthau Papers, Box 171, p. 18).

Important for the present discussion is Morgenthau's assumption according to which power can be experienced, evaluated, guessed at, but it is 'not susceptible to quantification' (Morgenthau 1970, p. 245). As Morgenthau explains in *Truth and Power*, certain elements that go into the making of power, be it individual or collective, can be quantified. Nevertheless, we should not make the mistake to equate such quantifiable elements with 'power as such' (Morgenthau 1970, p. 245). In Morgenthau's example, it is certainly 'possible and necessary' to determine how many votes a politician controls, but these are not a reliable indicator of how much power that political actor actually has (Morgenthau 1970, p. 245). In Morgenthau's categorical formulation, if one wants to know how much power this politician or that government has, he 'must leave the adding machine and the computer for historical and necessarily qualitative judgment' (Morgenthau 1970, p. 245).

These statements represent a good introduction to the main theme of this chapter: 'the disenchantment of politics'. In Morgenthau's view, in modernity, human existence and within it the sphere of politics itself have been disenchanted, which means that they have been subjected to, and reduced to, calculations which tell us nothing about their intrinsic meaning. There is a strong case that disenchantment is central to Morgenthau's understanding of modern politics, and in the articulation of this topic, Morgenthau mirrors Weber's criticism regarding the consequences of rationalism, and the employment of methods pertaining to the natural sciences in the domain of the social sciences in particular. As Molloy puts it, unsurprisingly given his background and training, Morgenthau's political science 'was derived from the German understanding of science as *Wissenschaft*, and was essentially hermeneutic rather than "scientific" in the Anglo-American understanding of that word' (Molloy 2004, p. 6).

As we saw when examining Weber's position on the issue of disenchantment, Weber argued that the increasing intellectualization and rationalization of modern life 'do *not* lead to an increased and general knowledge of the conditions under which one lives' (Weber 1948, p. 32). The present thesis contends that this view stands as a leitmotif for Morgenthau's approach on the issue too. A crucial problematic to Morgenthau, at first he deals with it in the context of his confrontation with the post-war US so-called 'behavioralist revolution', which he witnessed unfolding at the University of Chicago. Nevertheless, he returns to the critique of rationalism throughout his life, and his views do not change. Rationalist attempts have rendered politics meaningless, and Morgenthau fights against this tendency, continuously trying to raise awareness that the 'truth' of political science is not mainly about international treaties or institutional reform. On the contrary, it is the truth about power, 'its manifestations, its configurations, its limitations, its implications, its laws' (Morgenthau 1955, p. 446), about power, with all its arrogance and blindness, its limits and pitfalls (see Morgenthau 1970, p. 28).

In *The Decline of Democratic Politics*, Morgenthau explores this issue at length, and he draws readers' attention to the fact that political problems 'grow out of certain conflicts of interests, certain antagonisms which no amount of knowledge can eliminate as such' (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 313). Such problems can simply not be solved 'by the invention of a mechanical formula, which will allow mankind to forget about them and turn its attention toward a non-yet solved political problem' (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 313). Being projections of human nature into society, Morgenthau maintains, such problems cannot be settled at all: they 'can only be restated, manipulated, and transformed, and each epoch has to come to terms with them anew' (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 313). In Morgenthau's bleak conclusion, politics



dies, and its meaning is lost at the hands of scientism: 'the ideal of scientism as applied to politics is the disappearance of politics altogether' (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 313).

Morgenthau argues that the experience of the bureaucratization and mechanization of social life and the consequent diminution of the human person are 'particularly pronounced in the political sphere', (Morgenthau 1970, pp. 436-7). Contemporary political relationships are marked by an unprecedented discrepancy in power between the wielder of power and its object, and power 'overwhelms the individual not only by its irresistibility, but also because of its mechanized and bureaucratized nature, by its unfathomable anonymity' (Morgenthau 1970, pp. 436-7). In Morgenthau's view, the individual lives 'in something approaching a Kafkaesque world, insignificant and at the mercy of unchallengeable and invisible forces' (Morgenthau 1970, pp. 436-7). Within this context, Morgenthau repeatedly emphasises 'the unbridgeable gap' that exists between the reality of the political issues with which humans must come to terms, and the modes of thought and action by which they are being governed (see Morgenthau 1972, p. 189). In *Truth and Power*, he warns his readers that theoretical understanding 'cannot say, with any degree of certainty, which of the alternatives is the correct one and will actually occur' (Morgenthau 1970, p. 256), while in *Science: Servant or Master?*, he states that in the 'real' political world, man 'cannot afford to treat political problems as though they were scientific ones' (Morgenthau 1972, p. 61). Moreover, in an early unpublished speech held at the Chicago Institute for Religious and Social Studies, Morgenthau claims that any 'true and genuine' culture is, on the one hand, able to understand the facts of political life as they exist, while on the other hand, it is able to transcend these facts by 'a spiritual conception of life' (5 February 1946,

Morgenthau Papers, Box 153, p. 2). However, says Morgenthau, 'our civilization refuses to recognize the facts of political life, and because of this refusal, it is unable to transcend those facts through a spiritual conception of life' (5 February 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 153, p. 2).

Human plurality leads to unpredictability in social and political affairs. Consequently, Morgenthau contends that there exists an element of uncertainty which makes it impossible to plan effectively in the international sphere, and he often mentions 'the secrets of the human mind', and the contingent character of political history. However, instead of finding an acknowledgment of these facts (which to him are unquestionable) in IR, Morgenthau finds a mode of thought which maintains that you can deal with international politics in the same exact, precise and objective way in which you deal with chemistry, physics, or any other exact science (see Lecture 4, 12 April 1962, Morgenthau Papers, Box 171, p. 7). In Morgenthau's view, a chasm exists between human reality, with all its forces – 'indifferent, if not actively hostile, to the commands of reason' - and the precepts of rationalism as they are applied to politics. This chasm is unbridgeable and stands as proof of the inability of rationalism to grasp the ever changing distributions of forces which characterise this field. Molloy aptly summarizes this position by saying that for Morgenthau modern thought, as represented by rationalism, is 'basically inadequate and inapplicable to the task of interpreting the social world' (Molloy 2004, p. 5).

Morgenthau's critique of rationalist politics, and his outcry against the disenchantment of politics, appear in many of his works, and mark a guiding thread and a central pillar among his theoretical concerns. In *Scientific Man vs Power Politics* – an early, very virulent attack upon rationalism in politics, and also a forceful plea against the disenchantment of this realm - Morgenthau argues that in

this field, in the past, the lust for power pursued its violent game; now, by contrast, we witness the performances of the proponents of a 'science of peace' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 70), for whom politics 'plays the role of a disease to be cured by means of reason' (Morgenthau 1947, pp. 66-7). According to their hopes, in this field, the all too worshipped 'goddess' – reason – 'would reign supreme through the medium of the political scientist, the economist, the sociologist, the psychologist' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 34). The reform by rationalisation, by simplifying an otherwise complex reality and disenchanting it, is ironically portrayed by Morgenthau:

Political manoeuvring should be replaced by the scientific 'plan', the political decision by the scientific 'solution', the politician by the 'expert', the statesman by the 'brain-truster', the legislator by the 'legal engineer' (...) Even revolution becomes a 'science', the revolutionary leader the 'engineer of the revolution' (Morgenthau 1947, pp. 31-2).

Meanwhile, in *The Decline of Democratic Politics*, Morgenthau rejects scholars' academic formalism which, in its concern with methodological requirements, 'tends to lose sight of the goal of knowledge and understanding, which method must serve' (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 45). Time and again, he stresses the gap between the moral ideal and the facts of political life, and he criticises the theorising, 'abstract in the extreme and totally unhistoric', which is now to be found in the realm of international politics (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 45). As Morgenthau suggests, rationalist theorising 'endeavours to reduce international relations to a system of abstract propositions with a predictive function' (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 65), and this is an action which he is quick to condemn. Following the rationalists' emphasis on

theoretical abstractions which do not properly convey the processes at work in politics, a 'divorcement' from reality has been performed in this domain (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 33).

In Morgenthau's contention, it has become obvious that 'the great issues of our day are not susceptible to rational solutions within the existing system of power relations' (Morgenthau 1970, p. 6). In *Truth and Power*, he argues that the rationalists use the wrong intellectual resources to understand, and to deal with, the main political questions. They are not aware of the concreteness of historic situations (Morgenthau 1970, p. 256), and their contributions seem to neglect 'the moral dilemmas, political risks, and intellectual uncertainties inherent in politics' (Morgenthau 1970, p. 243). They overlook the fact that political events are unique occurrences indeed. Rationalists also seem to forget that in the realm of politics there are psychological forces 'that interfere with the smooth operation of the rational calculus' (Morgenthau 1970, p. 245). As Morgenthau is keen to emphasise, the proponents of rationalism need to take into account that their theories are not created in a vacuum, but in a social context and political space 'in which truth, superstition, and different conceptions of ends and means struggle for influence upon thought and action, and they contribute to the outcome of that struggle' (Morgenthau 1970, p. 247). Morgenthau argues that politics, domestic and international, is susceptible to 'a radically different kind of understanding from that which is appropriate to the world of nature' (Morgenthau 1970, p. 201). This happens because, for Morgenthau, when one tries to understand the phenomena which make up this domain, he deals with human individuals, as spiritual and moral beings (bio-psychological drives are therefore put in accord with moral considerations), whose actions and reactions 'can

be rationalized and quantitatively understood only in the lowest level of their existence' (Morgenthau 1970, p. 245).

In *Truth and Power*, Morgenthau asserts pessimistically that the common aim of rationalist enterprises is to accomplish 'a pervasive rationalization of international relations by means of a comprehensive theory' (Morgenthau 1970, p. 242). Their ultimate purpose is to increase the reliability of prediction, and therefore to remove uncertainty from political action (Morgenthau 1970, p. 242). Moreover, rationalist approaches are reductionist to Morgenthau, as they try to reduce, for instance, politics to economics (Morgenthau 1970, p. 244). In their account, nations confront each other not as 'living historical entities with all their complexities', but as rational abstractions, after the model of "economic man", 'playing games of military and diplomatic chess according to a rational calculus that exists nowhere but in the theoretician's mind' (Morgenthau 1970, p. 244). These theories espouse a dogmatic attitude, and preach 'a kind of metaphysics': they do not try to reflect reality, but want 'to superimpose upon a recalcitrant reality a theoretical scheme that satisfies the desire for thorough rationalization' (Morgenthau 1970, p. 243). As Morgenthau argues further, in a strikingly Weberian formulation, the dogmatism of the contemporary theories of international relations reveals itself as a 'new scholasticism', that is, an intellectual exercise, frequently executed with a high degree of acumen and sophistication, 'that tells us nothing we need to know about the real world' (Morgenthau 1970, p. 246), because they do not take into account, and do not reflect upon, the social and political 'reality' of the struggle for power as meaning imposition.

Morgenthau concludes by saying that the new theories are utopian, and he criticises them for their underestimation or even plain neglect of the struggle for

power and of the contingency of historical developments. What Morgenthau calls present day utopias reflect their authors' desires and wishful thinking, not the real physical world, which to him appears dominated by the principle of indeterminacy, by perspectivism and a larger form of relativism, and predictable 'only by way of statistical probability' (Morgenthau 1970, p. 245). In Morgenthau's view, the only difference between the rationalist utopias and those of the past comes from the fact that they 'replace the simple and obvious deductions from ethical postulates with a highly complex and sophisticated methodological and terminological apparatus, creating the illusion of empirical demonstration' (Morgenthau 1970, p. 243).

In Morgenthau's bleak picture of modernity after the death of God, political institutions have lost their transcendent meaning, and they expand quantitatively 'in order to experience in the faultless functioning of an imposing apparatus a certainty of meaning that they have actually lost' (Morgenthau 1945, p. 21). Following the developments outlined above, the meaning of politics - as an autonomous sphere of thought and action capable of a destructive struggle, but also of construction and re-enchantment - is destroyed, and its disenchantment completed. Rationalist approaches have disenchanted politics by imposing a meaning which fails to do justice to the myriad of unpredictabilities contained within the political realm, to the protean nature of politics as a sphere of human interaction par excellence. As Morgenthau maintains, instead of working towards revealing the meaning of politics, they have imposed an erroneous interpretation, and have rendered politics meaningless.

In Morgenthau's account, expressed in an early article called 'The Evil of Politics and the Ethics of Evil', three consequences of disenchantment stand out: 'the incapacity for meaningful political action, the temptation to support the powers-that-

be and justify the status quo, and, consequently, the discredit of the systems of thought leading to such results' (Morgenthau 1945, p. 3). The incapacity for meaningful political action is the one which, this thesis argues, appears to be the most dangerous to Morgenthau because it affects the superior agent from whose responsible actions re-enchantment is likely to spring. As we saw, Morgenthau maintains that rationalism removes the uncertainty of choice from (international) political acts. The statesman is rendered powerless in front of the rationalist attack, which leaves him without room to demonstrate his political creativity, without the power to decide, and then to implement his decisions. He turns into a slave of rationalism, which imposes upon him an interpretation which neglects perspectivism and uncertainty, as intrinsic characteristics of politics. Morgenthau contends that what rationalism does is not so much to inform the will of the statesman, but to replace it. Each social problem is supposed to be soluble by one rational solution, scientifically determined, and the political act itself 'is transformed into the technical application of the scientific solution' (Morgenthau 1971, p. 619). In Morgenthau's interpretation, politics, formerly a struggle of interests defined in terms of power, 'is reduced to the demonstration of the truths the social sciences have to offer for the solution of political problems' (Morgenthau 1971, p. 619). The role of the statesman is therefore reduced to that of reproducing the findings of scientism, with no creative will behind it, with no awareness of the contingency and perspectivism which characterise politics.

The ascendancy of what Morgenthau calls 'the scientific elites' constitutes not only a proof of their monopoly of esoteric knowledge, but also of 'the abdication, in the face of it, of the politically responsible authorities, and of the politically conscious public' (Morgenthau 1970, p. 236). The retreat from the confrontation

with rationalism, and from politics altogether, is often criticised by Morgenthau. In his article 'The Evil of Politics and the Ethics of Evil', he contends that the retreat from politics amounts for a particular kind of selfishness, 'which cultivates the peace of one's own conscience, bought by abstention from meaningful political action' (Morgenthau 1945, p. 4). In view of the forces forever engaged in a battle over good and evil, and of the ethical and political risks which are unavoidably incurred in meaningful political action, the actor's abstention from it for the sake of moral purity is condemned, since it 'seems to miss the point' (Morgenthau 1945, p. 4). Here it is clear that for Morgenthau the *homo politicus* duty is to act, to take a stand, and to try to counteract the disenchantment of the political sphere, by means of reaffirming his creativity. If he does not, Morgenthau suggests, the dominance of rationalist politics may trigger consequences likely to be more dramatic than it is generally assumed, such as a nuclear total war.

In Morgenthau's account, there are indeed many dangers in applying an 'unrealistic', 'quarantined', scientific interpretation to political affairs. As Morgenthau argues in some of his seminal writings published in the seventies, in response to the arms race which was escalating at that time, technological development is bad because the natural sciences have put into the hands of governments 'the technical means with which to exercise totalitarian control over their citizens, and to destroy humanity' (Morgenthau 1972, p. 11). Moreover, they have 'drastically impaired man's freedom and dignity, and have alienated him from society and government' (Morgenthau 1972, p. 11).

Morgenthau notes that in modernity scientific arguments have become 'indispensable weapons' in the struggle for power within the executive branch, and the scientific elites are the providers of these weapons. Starting out as the



disinterested purveyors of esoteric knowledge, the scientific elites have thus ended up 'by rationalizing and justifying political interests by dint of their possession of esoteric knowledge' (Morgenthau 1970, p. 231-2). Consequently, science has turned into a means, into a mere instrument for acquiring, defending, and demonstrating power (Morgenthau 1972, p. 14). In this context, Morgenthau often emphasises the relationship between fascism and scientism, and he contends that, 'in a sense', fascism represents the fruition of scientism: it stands as 'an important example of an attempt to deal with international affairs scientifically' (see Morgenthau's reply to Oakeshott, 22 May 1948, Morgenthau Papers, Box 44, page 1). In Morgenthau's view, expressed in an unpublished lecture, fascism contains a strong 'scientific element' (Lecture 1, 3 January 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 10). Along with liberalism and Marxism, fascism tries 'to understand international affairs in a scientific way and to control them according to certain scientific laws', 'to subject political affairs to scientific analysis and scientific control' with cold and ruthless calculation (Lecture 1, 3 January 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, pp. 9-10). As Morgenthau mentions in *Scientific Man vs Power Politics*, the appearance of fascism in our midst 'ought to have convinced us that the age of reason, of progress, and of peace, as we understood it from the teachings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, had become a reminiscence of the past', and the failure of fascism has given Western civilization 'another chance to re-exercise its own philosophy, to revive its own assumptions, and to reconcile its traditions with the experiences and exigencies of modern life' (Morgenthau 1947, pp. 13, 15).

This section has shown that in Morgenthau's view rationalist politics imposes a particular set of meanings onto modern understandings and practices of politics which does not do justice to the latter. On the contrary, for Morgenthau, they

represent erroneous and dangerous impositions which theorists must depart from if they want to embark on discovering the 'real' wonderment and meaning of the political. As Morgenthau often reminds his readers, in the 'true order of things', it is the political will that dominates (Morgenthau 1971b, p. 620), and this is a will primarily informed not by scientific theories, but by wisdom. Therefore, in Morgenthau's account, another form of power politics does exist, and it represents a viable and desirable alternative to scientific power politics. Morgenthau's alternative is what this thesis would like to call 'thoughtful politics'.

Morgenthau maintains that his superior hero is not a rationalist subject. He is endowed with greatness, which represents 'the ability to push the human potential for achievement in a particular respect to its outer limits, or beyond them' (Morgenthau 1970, p. 133). As Morgenthau explains in *Truth and Power*, when we speak of great painters and great writers, we call them great 'because they have done what others may do well, indifferently, or badly, with a measure of excellence that at least intimates perfection' (Morgenthau 1970, p. 133). The actions undertaken by the great political actor can re-imbue the political with meaning, and therefore re-enchant the world, and they can contribute to the achievement of the supreme goal of the age, as spelled out by Morgenthau in *The Decline of Democratic Politics*: 'the restoration of politics as an autonomous sphere of thought and action' (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 3). Contrary to many assessments of Morgenthau's theory which emphasise the contrary, and point to the supposedly immoral character of his vision of politics, here it becomes clear that Morgenthau does not endorse an interpretation of the political world made up only of a 'pure' struggle for domination, capable of never ending destructiveness. Morgenthau's theory is also about construction through

responsibility, about construction as 'art', about politics as a sphere of human action which can provide outstanding opportunities.

The best way of tackling the constructive part of Morgenthau's theory is through unpacking Morgenthau's vision of leadership. The next section is devoted to this task, and it will focus on the re-enchantment brought about by thoughtful politics, which to Morgenthau represents a viable and constructive alternative to the destructiveness and disenchantment of scientific politics.

### **4.3 Thoughtful Politics, as a Solution to the Evil of Politics**

Hans Morgenthau's *In Defense of the National Interest* opens with a quotation which is relevant for the present discussion of the wise statesman's qualities, and of his mission. Morgenthau quotes here from Winston Churchill - one of the few statesmen he admired for their 'art', along with Richelieu, Metternich, and Bismarck, and in whose thought he saw, as admitted in an early unpublished lecture, 'not only eloquence, but a summary of the experience and the wisdom of the ages' (5<sup>th</sup> Lecture at the Oriental Institute, 7 April 1950, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 15). Morgenthau quotes Churchill arguing that although people cannot live without idealism, 'idealism at other people's expense, and without regard to the consequences of ruin and slaughter which fall upon millions of humble homes, cannot be considered as its highest or noblest form' (Morgenthau 1982, p. 2). In this quotation, significantly placed at the beginning of one of his major contributions to IR theory, a theme surfaces which is dear to Morgenthau: the responsible, consequentialist oriented politics, in which great characters are engaged.

Taking into account the central place it holds in Morgenthau's theory, it is surprising that scholars have not treated Morgenthau's account of leadership methodically and at length so far. This gap is filled here, and an outline follows of Morgenthau's analysis of thoughtful leadership, with an emphasis on its capacity to

provide solutions to the disenchantment and evil of politics. As will be shown below, there are strong grounds for holding that, for Morgenthau, while scientific politics acts in relation to scientific truths, thoughtful politics acts in relation to anticipated consequences.

Moreover, in contrast to critics who have emphasised the supposed lack of concern with values embedded in his theory, there is no better place to see Morgenthau's ethical concerns at work than his account of leadership, and this is the reason for examining it in detail. Morgenthau links his interpretation of leadership with his discussion of values, and his account stands as an ethical analysis of individual political action. Aware of what he calls 'the curious dialectic of ethics and politics, which prevents the latter (...) from escaping the former's judgment and normative direction' (Morgenthau 1982, p. 2, p. 5), Morgenthau pleads for a re-enchantment informed by knowledge, performed by an actor likely to use the opportunities provided by the death of God to create and impose values, while also keeping an eye on the consequences of his actions, and demonstrating prudence. In a modernity plagued by rationalism, and in a disenchanted political sphere, Morgenthau suggests that there seems to be one hope available. This hope springs from the responsible imposition of meaning performed by a character whom Morgenthau calls the 'genuine' statesman or diplomat, who exhibits wisdom and greatness.

When discussing the issue of human greatness, Morgenthau borrows from Pascal and Emerson. For the former, man was great because he was aware of being miserable. As Pascal said, being miserable is synonymous with knowing oneself to be miserable, 'but it is also great to know that one is miserable' (Morgenthau 1970, p. 4). The awareness of human limitations, and the propensity for reflectivity and

self-knowledge, are thus crucial constitutive elements of greatness. Moreover, in his notes for a projected monograph of Abraham Lincoln, Morgenthau quotes from Emerson: 'he is great who is what he is from nature, and never reminds us of others' (March 1975, Morgenthau Papers, Box 116, p. 2). Greatness is here synonymous with uniqueness, and it is native too. Morgenthau incorporates these attributes of greatness into his discussion of the statesman/diplomat, and in the articulation of the latter concept, he echoes Weber's account of charismatic leadership. This thesis argues that although Morgenthau's account of wisdom has some similarities with Weber's charisma (to be spelled out below), it cannot be reduced to the notion of charisma in the Weberian sense. Morgenthau's account employs a multi-faceted interpretation of leadership which points to its author's particular concern with meaning imposition, understood as a creative endeavour.

To Weber, 'charisma' is the quality of a personality 'which is esteemed as extraordinary', and because of it the bearer is 'considered to be endowed with supernatural or superhuman or at least extraordinary - not given to every man - powers or properties, or as God-sent or exemplary, and hence as "the Leader"' (Weber quoted in Lash and Whimster 1987, p. 317). Similarly, to Morgenthau, greatness is a quality inherent in some of the human individuals, not something to be acquired like power and riches. It is a 'gift of heaven', which is granted to those who deserve it, not to those who desperately try to achieve it: as Morgenthau asserts in *The Decline of Democratic Politics*, 'those who seek greatness with frenzied effort reveal through their very frenzy that they are lacking what it takes to be great' (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 173). Moreover, for Morgenthau wisdom represents 'the gift of intuition', and political wisdom 'is the gift to grasp intuitively the quality of diverse interests and power in the present and future, and the impact of different

actions upon them' (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 45). Clearly, for Morgenthau, political wisdom cannot be learned: as he asserts further in *Science: Servant or Master?*, it is 'a gift of nature, like the gift of artistic creativity, or literary style, or eloquence, or force of personality' (Morgenthau 1972, p. 45). As such, it can be deepened and developed by example, experience, and study, but it 'cannot be acquired through deliberate effort by those from whom nature has withheld it' (Morgenthau 1972, p. 45).

In the context of one of his unpublished discussions of the different types of authority – which mirrors the Weberian traditional-legal-charismatic triad – Morgenthau asserts that the modern charismatic leader differs from the pre-modern one, whose charisma was established by a religious sanction, and whose legitimacy was more stable due to its being derived from, and backed up by, what Morgenthau calls 'an objective order' (undated, Morgenthau Papers, Box 199, p. 18). Furthermore, in Morgenthau's account, all types of government contain a charismatic element, 'for they all require an implicit belief in the superior endowment of the rulers with wisdom, virtue, and power' (undated, Morgenthau Papers, Box 199, p. 16). This to Morgenthau does not mean, however, that political greatness is widespread, or easily attainable. In a political world in which so many actors are still ignorant of what they lack, and seek salvation in a rationalised, disenchanted experience, the charismatic, superior characters impress through their rare thoughtful reflection, and their commitment toward responsible creation. The sadness which these statesmen often feel is, despite appearances, a sign of strength: as Morgenthau states in *Politics among Nations*, knowing what they knew about themselves, their actions, and the world, 'they could not be but sad', and their sadness 'denotes the

resigned acceptance of the moral and intellectual imperfections of the political world and of their precarious place within it' (Morgenthau 1949, p. 135).

According to Morgenthau, there are two qualities which are not necessarily present in the intellectual, but are essential in the statesman: first, a sense of limits – 'limits of knowledge, of judgment, of successful action'; second, 'a commitment to a grand design, born of a sense of purpose that neutralizes the doubts arising from the awareness of limits' (Morgenthau 1949, p. 135). The latter part of this quotation shows that for Morgenthau, the human capacity for achieving creative excellence, for going beyond the limits of the 'customary' in order to bring about a 'grand design', makes up another element of greatness. Man's capacity for transcendence through creation is here emphasised.

Cavalli remarks that Weber 'attributed to charismatic leaders the power to produce the most important change – that taking place in *interiore homine*' (Cavalli in Lash and Whimster 1987, p. 317). Similarly Morgenthau suggests that genuine political thinking is action since, at the very least, 'it changes the consciousness of the thinker' (Morgenthau 1972, p. 59). By changing himself, the statesman also changes the political world. In Morgenthau's formulation, expressed in *Science: Servant or Master?*, 'the political world exists in relations among men, and if the consciousness of even one single man is changed, the political world is changed at this particular point' (Morgenthau 1972, p. 59). What the statesman says and does forms 'an integral part of a dynamic field of pressures and counterpressures,' and consequently his words and actions 'must be adapted carefully to the conditions from which they arise, and which they are intended to influence' (Morgenthau 1970, p. 17).



To be superior, a statesman must also possess the ability to look at oneself from a distance without being impressed, that is 'to see the world as it is, undistorted by the involvement of his ego' (Morgenthau 1972, pp. 133, 157). This is a demanding task, of whose difficulty Morgenthau is well aware. As he maintains in *Science: Servant or Master?*, the statesman's words and actions are easily bound to fall short of the logical consistency and 'theoretical purity' (Morgenthau 1972, p. 17), which are the earmarks of the intellectual detached from action. By submitting to such a vision of the genuine statesman, Morgenthau endows his ideal political actor with detachment, and this is a quality which he defines most clearly in his collection of essays *Truth and Power*:

The political actor (...) must detach himself from his own emotions and aspirations and judge the other man with an objectivity similar to that with which a scientist tries to understand the phenomena of nature. He must put himself into the other man's shoes, look at the world and judge it as he does. Anticipate in thought the way he will feel and act under certain circumstances (Morgenthau 1970, p. 69).

Morgenthau's superior political actor must gauge the importance of a new government, of a revolution, or of a new invention. He must evaluate these factors correctly, but he must also anticipate changes in the distribution of power (Morgenthau Papers, Box 153, pp. 6-7). In Morgenthau's view, anticipation seems to be a paramount quality indeed: a wise statesman must 'anticipate the future development of the distribution of power, and he must adapt his foreign policy to the future trends which he is able to anticipate' (Morgenthau Papers, Box 153, p. 7). As

mentioned earlier, these are no easy tasks at all in Morgenthau's account, especially under the 'gambling-like' conditions, which characterise foreign affairs. The extreme difficulty of the job of the statesman 'lies chiefly with the insecurity he is confronted when he tries to evaluate correctly those different factors, not only with regard to his own country, but also with regard to all others' (Morgenthau Papers, Box 153, p. 7).

The responsibility to act with an eye to consequences is, for Morgenthau, crucial in differentiating a statesman only with the name from a 'genuine' one. The latter carries within him 'a special moral responsibility to act wisely – that is, in accordance with the rules of the political art' (Morgenthau 1945, p. 10). In *Scientific Man vs Power Politics*, Morgenthau contends that politics 'is an art and not a science', and that what is required for its mastery is 'the wisdom and the moral strength of the statesman' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 16). He adds further that 'the social world, deaf to the appeal to reason pure and simple, yields only to that intricate combination of moral and material pressures which the art of the statesman creates and maintains' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 16).

According to Morgenthau, all action affecting others is subject to the ethics of responsibility, and in order to demonstrate wisdom a diplomat should always work according to its principles: as emphasised by Morgenthau in *Politics among Nations*, the one 'who thinks in legalistic and propagandistic terms is particularly tempted to insist upon the letter of the law... and to lose sight of the consequences which that insistence may have for its own nation and for humanity' (Morgenthau 1949, p. 441). From this perspective, it is not surprising to Morgenthau that responsible statesmen and diplomats 'do less than they probably could', and 'refuse to consider certain ends and to use certain means' (Morgenthau 1949, p. 174). As Morgenthau tells his readers in *Scientific Man vs Power Politics*, the success in preserving international

order depends 'upon extraordinary moral and intellectual qualities which all the leading participants must possess', and a statesman who does not correspond to these high standards, by 'judging contrary to the exigencies of the moment', may 'ruin his country forever' (Burke quoted in Morgenthau 1947, p. 187). The importance and subtlety of such an endeavour makes statecraft depart from all bureaucratic, vocation-less, 'rationalised' professions: in determining the goals of his country, in assessing those of others, in employing the adequate means suited to the pursuit of certain objectives, the statesman turns into an artisan, and his decisions are crucial not only for his country, but for humanity at large. As emphasised by Morgenthau in *Politics among Nations*, 'failure in any one of these tasks may jeopardize (...) the peace of the world' (Morgenthau 1949, p. 419).

Morgenthau reminds his readers in *Science: Servant or Master?* (Morgenthau 1972, p. 41) that the lack of wisdom has often defeated political action throughout history. For Morgenthau, the evil of politics stems from the fact that the immorality inherent in all human action is 'to a higher degree and more obviously present in political than in private action, owing to the particular conditions under which political action proceeds' (Morgenthau 1945, p. 13). As Morgenthau explains in his early article *The Evil of Politics and the Ethics of Evil*, 'what is done in the political sphere by its very nature concerns others who must suffer from unwise action' (Morgenthau 1945, p. 10). What is here done with good intentions but unwisely and hence with disastrous results appears to Morgenthau to be 'morally defective, for it violates the ethics of responsibility to which all action affecting others and hence political action par excellence is subject' (Morgenthau 1945, p. 10). The essence and meaning of political wisdom, and of the political actor's fate, are summarised by Morgenthau in the following paragraph taken from the article above:

To act successfully, that is, according to the rules of the political art, is political wisdom. To know with despair that the political act is inevitably evil, and to act nevertheless, is moral courage. To choose among several expedient actions the least evil one, is moral judgment. In the combination of political wisdom, moral courage, and moral judgment, man reconciles his political nature with his moral destiny (Morgenthau 1945, p. 5).

In order to act successfully on the political stage, the statesman must demonstrate that he has got 'a respectful understanding' of the object, nature, interests, propensities, and potentialities of politics (Morgenthau 1970, p. 69). Subsequently, in Morgenthau's portrayal of the superior statesman, the grand themes of power interpreted as meaning imposition, responsibility and (self) knowledge are interrelated. For Morgenthau, the genuine statesman is endowed with the gift of recognizing 'in the contingencies of the social world the concretisations of eternal laws' (Morgenthau 1947, p. 187) - the 'mechanisms' of human nature. Moreover, in Morgenthau's view, expressed in *Politics among Nations*, before the adoption of a decision, the statesman should first and foremost ask himself consequence-related questions, and 'beyond the victory of tomorrow', his mind, 'complicated and subtle', must anticipate the 'possibilities of the future' (Morgenthau 1949, p. 441).

In a relevant quotation taken from *Truth and Power*, Morgenthau asserts that great statesmen are those who possess 'a lucid awareness, both intellectual and moral, of the nature of the political act, of their involvement in it, and of the consequences of that involvement for themselves and for the world' (Morgenthau 1970, p. 134). It is precisely this awareness the one which gives thoughtful statesmen

‘the intellectual distinction and moral sensitivity that set them apart from the common run of politicians’ (Morgenthau 1970, p. 134). In an age in which religion can no longer assure salvation, man can be saved from despair ‘only by an understanding that portends mastery’ (Morgenthau 1972, p. 69): understanding thus paves the way to transcendence.

The superior political character must be aware of the evil of political action, of the fragile and ever changing political developments, which can easily escape control. In Morgenthau’s view, there is no escape from the evil of power, and political ethics ‘is indeed the ethics of doing evil’: ‘No ivory tower is remote enough to offer protection against the guilt in which the actor and the bystander, the oppressor and the oppressed, the victor and his victim are inextricably enmeshed. While it condemns politics as the domain of evil *par excellence*, it must reconcile itself to the enduring presence of evil in all political action’ (Morgenthau 1970, p. 17). The superior political actor must know all these, and must be aware that the threat to human existence emanates from politics (Morgenthau 1970, p. 30), and that the vital task of the age is ‘to transform the shock of wonderment that has its source in politics to the theoretical, systematic understanding of that source’ (Morgenthau 1970, p. 32). In Morgenthau’s conclusion, that understanding has two purposes: to create a philosophical order in our minds, ‘through the transformation of an unintelligible and discordant reality into a theoretical system for its own intellectual sake’, and to serve ‘as a preliminary to the elimination of the threats to human existence, by transforming reality’ (Morgenthau 1970, p. 33).

The statesman’s position and role in relation to the disenchantment of politics plays an important role in Morgenthau’s account of leadership. Within this context, Morgenthau reintroduces his criticism directed towards the political actors’

endorsement of empty moral abstractions, and their surrender to the forces of rationalization and disenchantment. Morgenthau warns that charismatic legitimacy is vulnerable to failure once it is stripped of its enchanted, ethereal quality: as it is a 'gift from heaven', Morgenthau argues, so it must 'at the very least guard against the exposure of being of this world' (undated, Morgenthau Papers, Box 199, p. 23). Once it is so exposed, it is emptied of its substance, and becomes disenchanting and meaningless, since 'both the rulers and the ruled have lost faith in the wisdom, the virtue, and the unchallengeable power of the government, which faith is the vital force of any legitimacy' (undated, Morgenthau Papers, Box 199, p. 23).

Morgenthau continuously guards against the statesmen's submission to the disenchantment of politics, and argues that what they must do instead is to try to counteract the phenomenon, and to acknowledge the contingencies and power struggles which make up the political world. According to Morgenthau, a foreign policy guided by abstractions is bound to fail, because it 'accepts a standard of action alien to the nature of the action itself' (Morgenthau 1982, pp. 33-4). Consequently, he criticises those statesmen who invoke abstract, supposedly universal moral principles, 'in whose image the world was to be made over' (Morgenthau 1982, p. 4), and who choose the path of what Morgenthau calls 'the moral crusade'. In writings composed in response to the Cold War ideological battle, Morgenthau criticises the political crusader who 'projects the national moral standards onto the international scene not only with the legitimate claim of reflecting the national interest, but with the politically and morally unfounded claim of providing moral standards for all mankind to conform to, in concrete political action' (Morgenthau 1982, pp. 36-7). To counteract this tendency, Morgenthau tries to raise the political actor's awareness on the perspectivism and relativism which, in his view, currently permeate the realm of

(international) politics. He tries to make the statesman acknowledge the contingencies of power, 'the rich complexities of experience', and 'the dreadful uncertainties' (Morgenthau 1982, p. 90) with which the political world confronts its protagonists (Morgenthau 1982, p. 82). He asks the political actor to take into account the importance of the cultural arrangement that supports his particular philosophic conception, and to realise that the empirical evidence which is presented to him has been 'artificially created' by this very cultural arrangement (see Lang 2004, p. 58). The genuine statesman, Morgenthau contends, is one who is aware of the social and intellectual forces that struggle for the minds of men, of the tragic inherent in human existence, and of the essential ambivalence of political moral judgment (see Lang 2004, p. 100). He takes into account the fact that politics is not abstract, quantifiable and static, but a very sophisticated and dynamic struggle.

Finally, Morgenthau argues that the statesman can afford to be generous and idealistic as long as this behaviour is not likely to affect adversely the national interest 'conceived as power among other powers' (Morgenthau 1982, p. 223). For Morgenthau, the national interest is an important variable which the statesman must take into account prior to implementing a political decision. It concerns the power relationships among nations, and as such its importance should not be underestimated, Morgenthau maintains. When a policy of generosity and idealism appears to be incompatible with the national interest, the statesman 'must make up his mind and choose one or the other' (Morgenthau 1949, pp. 33-4). As Morgenthau explains in *Politics among Nations*, a foreign policy which oscillates between these alternatives 'will neither reap the benefits of the one, nor avoid the pitfalls of the other' (Morgenthau 1949, p. 212). The analysis of the concept of the national interest does not form the object of the thesis, hence this brief mention of it here and in

section 5.2 later, in the context of the discussion of Morgenthau's vision of political construction, which points to the connection between the national interest and the demanding tasks of leadership.

Several of Morgenthau's books (see, for example, Morgenthau 1947 and 1949) end with sections devoted to the constructive potentialities of statecraft. In both cases, what Morgenthau emphasises is statesmanship's potential for benign mission, and his overall message ends therefore on a positive note. In Morgenthau's words, expressed in an unpublished lecture held at the University of Chicago, 'an element of art enters into the solution of political problems', and in politics, 'you have to be a creative artist' (Lecture 28, 18 March 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 13). Human greatness can thus be found on the political arena, although, in Morgenthau's view, very few are those who can rightfully claim to be 'great'. As Morgenthau explains years later in *Truth and Power*, after all, greatness is not a quality that the big masses of today want to discover in their leaders: on the contrary, they want their politicians to be 'wholehearted' and 'uncomplicated' in the pursuit of power (Morgenthau 1970, p. 137). According to Morgenthau, in a democracy, it is ordinariness, not greatness, which gains power: 'once a great man (...) has gained power under the cover of ordinariness, he can afford to bare his greatness to the multitude, but not before' (Morgenthau 1970, p. 137).

Instead of succumbing to wishful thinking, endless schemes and moral abstractions, and also to a rationalization which reduces their creative potentialities, and renders their endeavours meaningless, the statesmen should try to responsibly affirm their individuality on the political stage, and to counteract disenchantment. In Morgenthau's account, thoughtful statesmen represent therefore viable alternatives to the optimistic proponents of liberal internationalism, and forces likely to deal



successfully with the disenchantment brought by rationalist thinking. Moreover, by virtue of their wisdom, they are likely to be successful in confronting the evil of politics, and its most destructive consequences. In Morgenthau's interpretation, rather than being possessed by power, great statesmen are those who possess power, and 'rather than being devoured by it, they tame it' (Morgenthau 1962a, pp. 133-4).

In this chapter the specific characteristics of politics in Morgenthau's account have been addressed, and its disenchantment caused by rationalist endeavours analysed. The struggle for power as meaning imposition has been highlighted, and the dangers and the possibilities stirred up by the death of universal values have also been addressed. Last but not least, the chapter has outlined Morgenthau's critique of action for action's sake, and also his endorsement of a vision of responsible imposition of meaning, performed by superior political characters.

Surprising as it may appear to some observers in light of the considerations spelled out earlier, to Morgenthau the 'real world' has not become a myth yet, there is still a 'true' meaning of politics, and in a godless and disenchanted world, universality of values is still a possibility. Morgenthau criticises those statesmen who invoke abstract, supposedly universal moral principles, and tries to raise the political actor's awareness on the perspectivism and relativism which characterise present day politics. On the other hand however, he also pleads for a re-enchantment informed by a return to universal values and tradition.

The next chapter is dedicated to the analysis of Morgenthau's commitment towards universal values, and of the meaning of this endorsement for his theory. Most importantly, it also deals with the question of the supposed tension in Morgenthau's account, which stems from his commitment to both individual value creation and universal, transcendental values. The chapter argues that Morgenthau's

sophisticated position provides a solution to the challenges raised by contemporary politics. It is a solution which tries to reconcile identity with difference, unique creativity with universal humanity, while also justifying the continuing relevance of tradition, perceived as a barrier against the proliferation of action for action's sake. Morgenthau's concept of thoughtful politics stands as an ethical politics performed by superior statesmen who adhere to a set of standards understood as an ethos, to values which come to us from the past, and are still relevant to present day political problems.

## **5. Closing the Openness: Morgenthau on Meaning, Tradition, and the Statesman's Mission**

Chapter 3 has addressed Morgenthau's allegiance to the 'death of God' diagnosis, his awareness of the relativism and perspectivism of moral judgment, and his concern with the status of truth and meaning in modernity. Meanwhile, chapter 4 has analysed the translation of Morgenthau's metaphysics into a political theory with power as meaning imposition and disenchantment at its core, and has discussed the elements which make up Morgenthau's vision of political leadership. The present chapter represents the resolution which brings together the strands of the argument so far, and focuses on Morgenthau's commitment to the creative restoration of tradition, and on his attempt to close the openness announced by Nietzsche. The creative restoration of the 'old' constitutes Morgenthau's solution to the nihilistic crisis, and the unit by which he argues that the strength of political leadership is measured. Morgenthau's strategy for avoiding absolute relativism encompasses the use of a particular conception of man in order to stabilize meaning, and involves a constant move between universality and particularity, obvious in his conceptualisation of the statesman. The argument of the chapter demonstrates that Morgenthau finds the idea of tradition in politics very appealing, and he perceives it as a foundation likely to

offer guidance in the production of theory, and in the interpretation of current political developments.

The present chapter also aims to shed light on the apparent tension present in Morgenthau's thought, nourished by Morgenthau's often vague statements, between the emphasis on the creative overcoming of the 'old' morality, and his preaching of a return to the wisdom of the former. As outlined in previous chapters of the thesis, Morgenthau takes on board Nietzsche's relativist and perspectivist assumptions, and Weber's rationalization theme, and incorporates them into a theory permeated by a pessimistic account of modernity. He takes issue with the search for certainty, order and meaning, and with the unfolding of disenchantment, and stresses that political decisions cannot be right or wrong in terms of universal values and laws (Morgenthau 1959, p. 6). Morgenthau's diagnosis of political modernity criticises the fact that many political actors still find the spell of certainty appealing. As he puts it, they need 'meticulous ascertainment of the facts, precise planning, and elaborate organization', and try 'to create the illusion of certainty where there can be no certainty' (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 149).

On the other hand, however, at the same time with emphasising the relativity of moral judgment, Morgenthau maintains that there exists one moral code, albeit filtered through cultural and moral particularities (see Morgenthau 1979, p. 10). Moreover, in an early article, he argues that there are certain truths in the field of the social, and more importantly, the political sciences, which have 'a particularly stable and permanent quality', being 'as objective in truth as any statement of the natural sciences can be' (Lecture 4, 9 January 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 7). In Morgenthau's view, there is still a 'true' meaning of politics, there is still one 'truth', springing from the wisdom of tradition, derived from the dictum of the 'old' moral

order. As Morgenthau explains, there has to be *a* meaning, a singular foundation on which to base all interpretations, because in this way only, everything falls into place (Morgenthau quoted in Frei 2001, p. 176). Thus, Morgenthau does not reject the old moral framework, on the contrary. He pleads for its consideration in politics, and for a stabilization of the meaning of politics which appears very important to him in light of the threats posed by actions for actions' sake, and by nuclear total destruction.

Morgenthau's argument reveals a different understanding of plurality – not unbound, but always regulated, carefully expressed so as to avoid a total relativism, and to emphasise the wisdom of tradition, while also referring positively to humans' interpretative potential. Depending on the particular contexts within which he was writing, Morgenthau emphasised the two aforementioned facets of his theory at various points in his career, and as stated earlier, this led to him being perceived as contradictory. The argument that follows will show that these two facets coexist without contradiction, and their coexistence is to Morgenthau absolutely necessary, taking into account modernity's grappling with the crisis of values and with rationalization. The present reading argues that by holding such a vision, Morgenthau is ambivalent but not contradictory, and that the two stances complement each other within a sophisticated political theory, which represents Morgenthau's answer to the crisis of values and leadership, and is relevant to debates on modernity and postmodernity. Their co-existence also stands as a proof of Morgenthau's concern with morality, and his rejection of amoralism and of an 'anything goes' absolute relativism.

The chapter begins with an interpretation of Morgenthau's account of moral universality, and an emphasis on his understanding of tradition as universality. Morgenthau's concept of tradition is constituted within a formalistic and abstract

scheme, which he hardly ever explains in detail. Subsequently, the chapter provides a much needed interpretation, and a clarification, of the meaning of Morgenthau's concept of tradition, and shows that it applies to two realms: of values and of knowledge. The first section also argues that for Morgenthau, just like for Nietzsche (see Magnus and Higgins 1996, p. 242), tradition does not only constitute a past that has gone, but our present as well, and it provides a necessary core of meaning. It nurtures responsible creativity and prevents the excesses of relativism, while also allowing for the consideration of cultural and historical differences.

The second section of the chapter focuses on Morgenthau's superior political actor, who is in charge of the reinterpretation of tradition referred to earlier. His creative thinking 'illuminates the political experience of the day – and of all days – by discovering within it the perennial forces, problems, and patterns of interaction, of which political life consists' (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 1).

As shown in previous chapters, the issue of human agency is central to Morgenthau's theory, and he focuses on it with the awareness that humans are as much the problem as they are the solution to the ongoing moral and technological crisis of modernity.<sup>2</sup> The chapter will show that Morgenthau's superior hero is a creator who gains acceptance by virtue of his responsible actions, which are not a mere reproduction of tradition, but an imaginative reframing of it, relevant to the context and problems of the day. This is indeed the meaning attached by Morgenthau to the concept of political creativity.

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<sup>2</sup> David Chandler developed this compelling argument at a CRIPT workshop on the topic of posthuman politics, held at Goldsmith College on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2006.

## **5.1 Creation as Re-Interpretation: Morgenthau's Meaning of Universality**

In his short study of Nietzsche, modernity and aestheticism, Alexander Nehamas provides a persuasive interpretation of the tension within Nietzsche's thought, between his awareness of nihilism and subsequent celebration of human creativity, and his longing for a metaphysical overcoming of morality. As Nehamas explains, it is impossible to call Nietzsche 'the last metaphysician' as Heidegger did, because Nietzsche maintains a 'double relation' to any grand narrative, including, in particular, the philosophical tradition itself: 'he undermines that tradition, though he knows he cannot completely reject it; he looks beyond it, though he knows that he cannot see anything fundamentally different there' (Magnus and Higgins 1996, p. 231). In Nehamas's view, Nietzsche's attitude towards Modernity was complex and divided indeed: 'absolute rejections, like absolute distinctions, are very much what he constantly, absolutely tried to avoid' (Magnus and Higgins 1996, p. 226).

Such an ambiguous position has attracted criticism, observers pointing out that Nietzsche remains an idealist and a moralist in several key respects (see Ansell Pearson 2005, p. 116). As Ansell Pearson emphasises, Nietzsche's analysis of the phenomenon of European nihilism is 'too centred on a crisis of meaning and, as a result, it perpetuates the very thing it seeks to overcome, namely, metaphysics'

(Ansell Pearson 2005, p. 103). Within this context, Nietzsche's allegiance to Kant is often referred to: although he was a severe critic of Kant's attachment to metaphysics, Nietzsche 'could not renounce philosophy's pretension to legislate through the creation of new values' (Ansell Pearson 2005, p. 115. For an analysis of the 'Kantian foundations' of Nietzsche's thought, see also Hill 2005).

The argument here is driven by the reading that, similarly to Nietzsche, Morgenthau himself does not renounce modernity's moral foundation, as represented by Judeo-Christian and Kantian values, and he does this with good reasons. First, he still believes in this framework's value, and in its potential to provide meaning. Second, he is aware that his criticism is enclosed within the bounds of the very tradition he takes issue with, and that he cannot thus renounce it completely. From this latter perspective, the present reading suggests that Nehamas's assessment of Nietzsche captures well the essence of Morgenthau's own position in relation to grand narratives, and his views regarding the co-existence of contingency and perennity, following the death of God.

As previous chapters have shown, Morgenthau focuses on 'truth' – as a concept which according to some analysts, dominates and 'conditions' his thinking about the nature of politics (Molloy 2004, p. 1) - and questions its validity, in the aftermath of the 'death of God', when, he maintains, the breakdown of universal religion and universal humanism has left the world exposed to the perils of disenchantment (see Lecture 28, 18 March 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 2). Morgenthau subscribes to Nietzsche's views regarding the advent of nihilism, as 'the state in which a being has the need to call himself continually into question, to raise continually the question of the grounds of his existence, without anything being able to count as such grounds' (Ansell Pearson 2005, p. 123). Moreover, he is aware of



the competition for meaning imposition, in which humans eager to commit others to their particular version of the 'truth', are presently engaged. Following the demise of universal values, humans look at the world and judge it from the vantage point of their interests and beliefs, and depending on circumstances. On the political scene in particular, Morgenthau asserts, he who believes he has a monopoly of truth in matters political is free to propound his 'truth', which to him appears to be all the truth there is' (Morgenthau 1975, p. 4). As Morgenthau states in his 1970 book *Truth and Power*,

We judge and act as though we were at the center of the universe, as though what we see everybody must see, and as though what we want is legitimate in the eyes of justice. Turning Kant's categorical imperative upside down, we take it for granted that the standards of judgment and action produced by the peculiarities of our perspective can serve as universal laws for all mankind (Morgenthau 1970, p. 64).

We have seen that Morgenthau pleads in favour of the creative overcoming of morality, and he praises men's capacities in this regard. He thus holds faith in the opportunities provided by the collapse of universal values and 'standards of action', as 'ties' which to him appear to be weaker and weaker (Lecture 4, 9 January 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 7). The present reading maintains that like Nietzsche, for Morgenthau the affirmative ethics which follows the demise of universality represents 'a veil of beautiful possibilities' (Nietzsche quoted in Ansell Pearson 2005, p. 67). Interestingly enough however, while praising the death of a universal God of values and meaning, and while asking humans to strive towards

new, creative ways of thinking and action, Morgenthau also displays a nostalgia for what he calls the 'golden age of normalcy'. He decries the disintegration of those 'great intellectual systems from which the Western world used to receive its meaning' (see Morgenthau 1982, p. 4), and claims that the 'golden age' can indeed be restored. Far from rebuking modernity's values, Morgenthau insists on their creative re-working, in light of various cultural backgrounds and political developments. For Morgenthau, life is endowed with an ethical framework within whose confines humans can interpret - and thus generate a plurality of meanings - and then struggle for the imposition of their newly created meanings. Nevertheless, their interpretations must always be in accord with the initial, traditional framework referred to above. Aware that he cannot abolish modernity's universal platform of values, Morgenthau works out the implications stirred by the latter's weakening, and claims that any 'true' creation must resonate with the old moral order.

Morgenthau points to the fluctuating international political situation on numerous occasions, and in this context, he pleads for an adaptation of modes of thought and action to the political developments of the day. What is needed, Morgenthau asserts in one of his 'Reflections on the Nuclear Age' lectures given in 1962, is 'radical political change, commensurate with the radical novelty of the problems that require solution' (Lecture 11, 15 May 1962, Morgenthau Papers, Box 171, p. 4). Humans need to change their traditional habits of thought and action, in response to a changed world: 'if we do so, we will be the masters of the new age. If we fail to do so, we will become its victims' (Morgenthau 1965, Morgenthau Papers, Box 172, p. 14). While emphasising the changed character of the new world, which requires further changes at the level of the individual, Morgenthau also maintains that in the international political realm there should still be universal moral values which transcend national

values. In an unpublished lecture Morgenthau hints at the experience of Nazi Germany, and argues that a 'complete' relativism is dangerous, as it 'leads either to mere propaganda (...), or irrelevant empirical studies of a mere quantitative nature' (Lecture 4, 12 April 1962, Morgenthau Papers, Box 171, p. 15).

A good example of Morgenthau's nuanced position on the issue of values and the relationship universal – particular is represented by his 1979 speech on the topic of human rights. The context is very important in understanding the meaning of Morgenthau's plea: his paper was written during a time when the US administration's emphasis on the universal respect of human rights was at its height. Morgenthau begins his presentation by pointing to what he takes to be a decline in the adherence to moral values in general, and he argues that men live 'in a situation in which the moral restraints that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries contributed greatly to the civilized relations among nations are in the process of weakening, if not disappearing' (Morgenthau 1979, p. 3). He then turns to a critique of a universal interpretation of human rights, by emphasising the abstract and relative character of the concept. In response to the claim according to which human rights have universal validity, he maintains that human rights are 'filtered through the intermediary of historic and social circumstances, which will lead to different results in different times and under different circumstances' (Morgenthau 1979, p. 3). However, in the same paper, when discussing the necessity of a universal moral code, Morgenthau also tackles the issue of universality, and the way in which he addresses this concept helps him avoid falling into a relativist position. He argues that such a unique moral code does exist, albeit filtered through cultural and moral particularities (Morgenthau 1979, p. 10), and not fully discernible to humans. As Morgenthau argues further, there are certain 'basic' moral principles which are

applicable to all human beings. Such a principle is the preservation of life – in Morgenthau's formulation, 'I assume that the sacredness of human life is a general moral principle, subject to certain qualifications' (Morgenthau 1979, p. 25). As he concludes,

There exists a moral order in the universe which God directs, the content of which we can guess. We are never sure that we guess correctly, or that in the end it will come out as God wants it to come out. (...) The moral code is something objective that is to be discovered (Morgenthau 1979, pp. 35, 10).

Morgenthau places the concept of 'humanity' on the second pillar of his fundamental dichotomy: the ephemeral vs. the perennial. He thus implies that difference cannot exist without identity, and emphasises the necessary multiplicity within unity: the more humans are different, the more they are the same in their intrinsic humanity, and in their adherence to the traditional 'God' of meaning and universal values. Morgenthau often emphasises that the individual must always see national problems in their universal perspective, and be aware 'that there are universal moral values which transcend national values' (Lecture 4, 9 January 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 7). For Morgenthau, the absence of a 'working system of international ethics' (Lecture 25, 11 March 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 10) does not mean that this system has been rendered worthless, on the contrary: in his interpretation, its constituting pillars are valuable in guiding human action. The present reading maintains that while claiming this, Morgenthau reveals that to him, the transcendent space is not empty, but still meaningful. As Petersen explains, for Morgenthau, like in Nietzsche's case, 'man undeniably resides in a

shared space of meaning and intelligibility without which he would not be man but beast, because consciousness and its corollary, agency, presuppose determinacy - that is, the existence of a whole' (Petersen 1999, p. 88).

The transcendent character of Morgenthau's theory has been noted by several observers. Mollov for instance states that the main transcendent elements present in Morgenthau's theory regard 'morality in politics and statecraft', 'the responsibility of the intellectual to speak "truth to power"', 'the importance of philosophy to Morgenthau's approach to international relations', and his sustained emphasis upon the 'spiritual forces in man and politics' (Mollov 2002, p. 22). Meanwhile, Frei argues that Morgenthau's normative ethics juxtaposes 'the *is* with the *ought to be* that is not of this world', which transcend individual existence and reach upward, 'toward a heaven of supreme values (*hochste Werte*) in order to place life under timeless obligations' (Frei 2001, p. 166). These values, objective, independent and eternal, 'serve as ultimate goals and also as standards for evaluating thought and action' (Frei 2001, p. 166). Frei criticises Morgenthau for his laconic, insufficient explanation of the values envisaged, which make up the transcendental realm referred to above. Moreover, he singles out this lack of information as the main cause which has led to the perpetuation of the claim that Morgenthau's theory is amoral.

Indeed, Morgenthau rarely addresses the issue of moral values directly, or states his position clearly, and this has led to confusions and misinterpretations. In fact, Morgenthau maintains an ambiguous position regarding the content of the moral order he refers to throughout his life. During one of his lectures given in 1962 for instance, he argues that 'only God knows what the objective standards actually are' (Lecture 11, 15 May 1962, Morgenthau Papers, Box 171, p. 22). Moreover, when asked by a student about the nature of the standards envisaged, Morgenthau once

again does not provide a clear-cut answer, telling his student instead that ‘what you are really asking me is what is my political philosophy, and that is a very indiscrete (sic) question’ (Lecture 4, 12 April 1962, Morgenthau Papers, Box 171, p. 23). The nature of the values endorsed is only revealed unequivocally in an unpublished letter, in which Morgenthau mentions that he affirms two basic moral values: ‘the preservation of life, and freedom in the sense of the Judeo-Christian tradition and, more particularly, of Kantian philosophy’ (Letter to Edward Dew, 1962d, Morgenthau Papers, Box 17, p. 1). He therefore returns to Kant ‘silently’, after having distanced himself in his youth from neo-Kantians like Kelsen, as we have seen in chapter 2.

A critical assessment of Morgenthau’s position is performed by Paul Saurette, who integrates his discussion of Morgenthau within a broader analysis of the philosophical foundation of the Will to Truth and Order, which in his view informs International Relations, in both its Realist and Idealist renditions (Saurette 1996, p. 2). As Saurette argues, this foundation sets profound limits on the horizon of normative theory, by establishing as ‘natural’ an intellectual framework which circumscribes the very definition, and thus the normative potential, of politics (Saurette 1996, p. 2). In his thorough analysis of Nietzsche’s and Arendt’s contribution towards revitalising the political, in light of the philosophical crisis of modernity, Saurette points to Nietzsche’s exploration and critique of the philosophical tradition of the Will to Order (Saurette 1996, p. 2), and emphasises the importance of Nietzsche’s attack upon the concept of ‘truth’. Saurette argues that once it becomes clear that our modern understanding of political action - be it domestic or international - evolved from and depends upon this philosophical foundation of the Will to Truth and Order, ‘it also becomes apparent that both these

models are increasingly untenable in late modernity' (Saurette 1996, p. 2). From this perspective, Morgenthau's position, with all its emphasis on the quest for 'truth', and the necessity of a universal foundation of standards, appears unsatisfactory to Saurette. He argues that

it is absolutely paradoxical and yet completely consistent for Morgenthau to decry the international as the realm of irrationality and emergency, while nostalgically yearning for objective scientific laws which would allow the statesman to impose theoretical order on international politics, and thus lead to the actual control and mastery of the international realm (Saurette 1996, p. 15).

The argument developed here acknowledges Morgenthau's contribution, similarly to that of Nietzsche, in questioning the Will to Order, and the concept of 'truth' following the 'death of God'. It also suggests that Morgenthau's theoretical attempt resonates precisely with what Saurette has called 'Nietzsche's paradoxical charge': 'to overcome the will to truth and found a renewed philosophical Will to power, while simultaneously avoiding the abyss of modern nihilism' (Saurette 1996, p. 21). Similarly to Nietzsche, whose ambivalent position was masterfully articulated by Nehamas at the beginning of this section, Morgenthau implies that constructive endeavours cannot avoid being based upon modernity's realm of values, and he is aware that the 'old' tablet is impossible to be erased. Instead, Morgenthau argues, they should be re-interpreted and reintegrated within the realm of a post-Nietzschean experience. Morgenthau emphasises that such a foundation provides humans with the necessary guidance in confronting a disenchanted existence, while also being adamant that this realm is not fixed, but open to a variety of interpretations,

according to concrete historical and cultural factors. Following from this, for example, Morgenthau pleads in favour of the adaptation of the Ten Commandments 'to the concrete conditions under which men live'. As Morgenthau justifies this position, in one of his lectures on Aristotle from 1970, 'to comply with the Ten Commandments in the literal sense requires total human goodness, a total virtue that is not attainable by the man in the street' (Morgenthau quoted in Lang 2004, p. 94).

As emphasised several times throughout the thesis, there are strong reasons for taking the view that Morgenthau's foundationalism transpires in his analysis of the political realm in the aftermath of the 'death of God'. As seen from an early lecture given in the US, Morgenthau maintains that politics contains certain 'truths', which have 'a lasting character, being as objective as any statement of the social sciences can be' (Lecture 3, 7 January 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 7). In support of this claim, Morgenthau points to human nature, which comprises 'the basic psychological and mental qualities of man', which have remained constant throughout history (Lecture 3, 7 January 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 7). Significantly, this view is held by Morgenthau throughout his career. A constitutive feature of human nature – the lust for power – makes up another one of Morgenthau's examples of a 'perennial truth' (see Morgenthau 1962a, p. 20). As he explains in his collection of essays published in 1962, 'there are a number of qualities of men relevant to political action, which are of a permanent character, and out of those permanent qualities certain basic and typical configurations and problems arise which are also permanent throughout history' (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 20).

In contrast to those observers who have criticised him for his emphasis on a supposedly unregulated struggle for power, Morgenthau argues against the



glorification of power for power's sake, and condemns the mistake of overlooking 'those transcendent concepts by which political life must be judged, spiritualized and elevated' (Lecture 4, 9 January 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 7). Careful to distinguish his concept of political action from mere action for action's sake, Morgenthau implies that the former is held in check by what he calls 'a transcendent orientation'. Informed by the values of truth and order amongst others, and still successful in endowing human life with meaning, the universal moral foundation referred to above should not be overlooked in the political realm. More importantly, in Morgenthau's account, its constituting values make up the very end of politics. As he is keen to emphasise, 'to say that a political action has no moral purpose is absurd: for political action can be defined as an attempt to realize moral values through the medium of politics, that is, power' (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 110).

The need for foundations in politics is clear to Morgenthau, and he reiterates it at various stages in his career. In an article published in 1955, in reaction to the so-called 'behavioralist revolution', Morgenthau points that 'even the most anti-philosophic science of politics is founded upon a philosophic understanding of the nature of man and society, and of science itself' (Morgenthau 1955, p. 449), and forcefully adds that 'political science is of necessity based upon, and permeated by, a total world view – religious, poetic as well as philosophic in nature – the validity of which it must take for granted' (Morgenthau 1955, p. 449). Morgenthau decries the denial of the legitimacy and relevance of political philosophy for political science, and concludes that by means of this denial, political science 'cuts itself off from the very roots to which it owes its life, which determine its growth, and which give it meaning' (Morgenthau 1955, p. 449). Moreover, in one of his clearest accounts on the topic, published in 1962, Morgenthau argues that 'certainly' there must exist

‘objective criteria’ in politics, which are not clearly seen ‘because of the different interests and the particular historic situation in which the observer finds himself’ (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 20). As Morgenthau explains in an unpublished lecture, ‘there must be some element of scientific objectivity inherent in international affairs. For if nothing could be said about international affairs beyond mere subjective opinion, then there would be no science of international affairs at all’ (Lecture 2, 4 January 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 3). As he expresses a similar idea years later, in *The Decline of Democratic Politics*, without the assumption of the objectivity of certain standards for thinking and action, humans ‘would not be able to think systematically about politics at all’ (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 220). Order and justice and truth itself would become ‘the mere by-products of ever changing power relations’ - and this is a development which everyone should guard against (see Morgenthau 1962a, p. 52). As Morgenthau concludes with a categorical formulation, despite maintaining a relativistic theoretical point of view, in practice political actors must always act ‘on the assumption of such objective standards’ (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 14).

Morgenthau’s commitment to this position can be found in other writings too. As he maintains, in a later account on the topic, made public in his lectures on Aristotle, and around the time when he was working on the important statement-book *Science: Servant or Master?*, political problems are immutable, and any social investigation ‘receives its sense and meaning from a philosophic presupposition’ (Morgenthau quoted in Lang 2004, p. 15). That presupposition, Morgenthau adds, ‘may be unconscious, inchoate, or unsophisticated. But it exists’ (Morgenthau quoted in Lang 2004, p. 24). While acknowledging that political concepts are not mechanical, but get their concrete, substantive meaning from the particular cultural environment within

which they are applied (Morgenthau quoted in Lang 2004, p. 44), Morgenthau also points that, in contrast to the technical and scientific problems, the social and political ones do not change throughout history:

The problem of authority, the problems of the relations between the individual and the state, the purpose of the state, the common good, the issue of law versus naked power, the problem of violence, the class problem, the distribution of wealth in political terms – all those problems are of a perennial nature. They have not been discovered or invented in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Morgenthau quoted in Lang 2004, p. 44).

In Morgenthau's interpretation, the above considerations make up what he calls 'the tradition of political thought', from which 'truth' in matters political stems. Morgenthau affirms the value and wisdom of tradition at the very beginning of his academic career. The Morgenthau who emerges from the unpublished lectures argues in favour of creative thought, and emphasises the latter's illumination of the political experience of the day by rediscovering 'the eternal truth and perennial laws of foreign policy as they have been formulated throughout the ages' (5<sup>th</sup> lecture at the Oriental Institute, 7 April 1950, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 1). Without overlooking the lust for power and power politics itself, 'in all their threatening ugliness' - unquestionable central elements of politics for Morgenthau – the superior actors should nevertheless promote a return to tradition, universal meaning, and religious knowledge. As Morgenthau explains in a moving paragraph taken from one of his unpublished lectures,

Let us also face the facts of spiritual life, those transcendent values which give meaning to our political struggles and to our political sufferings, and which may enable us to overcome, first in our own consciousness, and then on the political scene itself, the misery of political power (Morgenthau 5 February 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 2).

Moreover, an extended analysis of the concept of tradition is undertaken in the preface to one of the collections of essays which Morgenthau published in 1962, and there are strong reasons for taking the view that this can be read as a reaction to the aforementioned 'behavioralist revolution'. This book, Morgenthau states, assumes 'not only the continuing value of the tradition of political thought for the contemporary world, but also the need for the restoration of its timeless elements': it is especially concerned with the restoration of politics, 'as an autonomous sphere of thought and action' (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 3). In Morgenthau's account, political thought in every epoch 'is but the particular manifestation and application of a general philosophy' (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 2). Moreover, each epoch of history has the task 'to disengage from the tradition of political thought those truths which fit its own experience and, in turn, to separate out of the welter of its own experience the perennial configurations of political life' (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 2). In Morgenthau's view, therefore, tradition is a living and evolving concept: each epoch 'must test yesterday's dogmas against the facts of today, and today's orthodoxies against the perennial truths', liberating itself from 'the dead hand of tradition', while not falling victim to new dogma, or else being lost in the labyrinth of uncomprehended experience (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 2).

The re-interpretation of tradition and its positioning at the centre of politics are imperative to Morgenthau, taking into account the context he writes against (behaviouralism). He denounces the 'presently fashionable' theorizing about IR, which is 'abstract in the extreme and totally unhistoric', and which endeavours to reduce IR to a system of abstract propositions with a predictive function (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 65). Morgenthau criticises the proponents of this theorizing for their neglect of the teachings of tradition, and for their attempt 'to throw all tradition overboard, and either to deny the existence of objective political truth altogether, or else to seek it in some novel political arrangement or device, apparently unencumbered by past political experience' (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 2). In contrast to Morgenthau's theory, which is historical, in his account the behaviourists overlook the contingencies of history and the concreteness of historic situations, and consequently their assumptions 'must fail both as guides for theoretical understanding, and as precepts for action' (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 66). Finally, in a formulation which he will reiterate in his human rights lecture, fifteen years later, Morgenthau warns against the careless use on the international scene of a particular interpretation which overlooks the 'truth' of politics. While finding the perennial truths of politics imbedded in the shell of historic contingencies, Morgenthau asserts, each generation is nevertheless 'tempted by its prideful or spiteful identification with its own times to give the contingent the appearance of the perennial' (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 2). The picture of politics following these endeavours is bleak:

Of politics nothing is left but the struggle of individuals and groups for access to the levers of power, in terms either of majority or oligarchic rule, crying out again either for expert management or else for utopian reform, oblivious of the

distinction of what is desirable and what is possible and of the ineluctability of power itself (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 3).

Against a disenchanted political life, Morgenthau advances the ideal of restoration. He pleads in favour of a reconsideration of tradition, convinced of the latter's wisdom and capacity to guide political action in a post-Nietzschean era. In his critical reaction to the behaviorist developments, we notice his forceful commitment to tradition, perceived as a living, evolving concept, open to new interpretations, yet also made up of an immutable hard core of meaning. To what he takes to be the behaviouralists' abstractions, Morgenthau opposes an almost equally abstract vision, which nevertheless differs from that of the behaviouralists in its emphasis on change and responsible creativity, as the basis for a successful politics.

Along with the issue of the grounding of value, the erosion of the authority of tradition preoccupied Nietzsche too (see Magnus and Higgins 1996, p. 226). He was aware that 'once the value of tradition has been called into question, we cannot appeal to the fact that, say, a practice belongs to a tradition as a reason for valuing it' (Magnus and Higgins 1996, p. 226). Nevertheless, Nietzsche regarded tradition positively, and guarded against the latter's neglect: 'one considers tradition a fatality; one studies it, recognizes it (as "hereditary"), but one does not *want* it; it is the disorganizing principle that gives our age its character' (Magnus and Higgins 1996, p. 226). Similarly to Nietzsche, who is aware that tradition 'does not only constitute a past that has gone (...), but our present as well', and who claims that 'suspiciousness of tradition and of the past is of a piece with resignation about the new and the future' (Magnus and Higgins 1996, p. 227), Morgenthau pleads in favour of a re-enchantment informed by the values brought to us by previous centuries.

In this task, a crucial role in Morgenthau's account is played by the statesman, who has the necessary skills to implement responsible creation. It is him who can contribute to the accomplishment of the vital task of our times: the understanding of the 'true' meaning of politics, which to Morgenthau has got a lot to do with power struggle and conflicting moral voices, and little to do with rationalist measurements and calculations. Like Nietzsche's *Übermenschen*, Morgenthau's statesmen are 'the strongest', to quote one of Nietzsche's most discerning observers. They are 'the most moderate ones who do not need extreme articles of faith, but can concede a good deal of contingency and nonsense and even love it, and who can think of man with a moderation of his value without becoming small and weak in return' (Ansell Pearson 2005, p. 102).

This chapter has so far examined the concept of 'tradition' in Morgenthau's theory. The focus now turns to the issue of political creativity, and to the superior interpreter of tradition in particular, as he is portrayed by Morgenthau: the statesman. The analysis of the statesman is important and necessary in this context since the superior actors are the only ones who in Morgenthau's account can re-interpret tradition responsibly, and avoid action for action's sake. While the last section of chapter 4 has pointed to these superior actors' endorsement of a Weberian ethics of responsibility, the following section will differ from chapter 4 in its discussion of Morgenthau's critique of unskilled statesmanship/diplomacy, and in its depiction of the issues in Morgenthau's account likely to attract criticism.

## **5.2 The Statesman and His Mission: Re-enchantment**

In his 1970 collection of essays called *Truth and Power*, Hans Morgenthau embarks on a detailed analysis of political leadership, which mirrors his interest in the topic, and argues that there are two ways to be great in the pursuit of power (Morgenthau 1970, p. 133). On the one hand in Morgenthau's dichotomy, there are those statesmen who have chosen power as the ultimate aim in life, and who must use truth and virtue as means to their chosen end, and discard these when they do not serve that end (Morgenthau 1970, p. 133); the examples given here are Borgia, Stalin, and Machiavelli's prince. On the other hand, perhaps surprisingly for those who still see him as a hard-nosed Machiavellian, Morgenthau's second understanding of political greatness is that which 'owes less' to Machiavelli, and more to Plato's postulate of the philosopher-king, and to the Hebrew-Christian ideal of the wise and good ruler (Morgenthau 1970, p. 133). In this latter case, political greatness does not consist in the single-minded pursuit of power, but also in the ability to subordinate it to the transcendent intellectual and moral values mentioned in the previous section of the chapter. While the first type of greatness is exemplified by the political actor who seeks to reduce his fellow men to a means for his ends, the latter is embodied by the responsible statesman, whose actions represent the creative re-interpretation of tradition.



Morgenthau's superior characters are often portrayed, and their role emphasised, within the context of his discussion of the fate of man, following the three great revolutions – political, technological and moral - which have marked 'the definite and radical end of the political, technological, and moral conditions under which Western world has lived for centuries' (Morgenthau 1982, p. 40). In Morgenthau's account, the 'death of God', and the present disregarding of values, in part stimulated by technology (see Morgenthau 1979, p. 35), require the emergence of strong political agents, who engage in acts directed towards meaning imposition, perceived as a demanding, crucial enterprise.

Just like for Weber, for Morgenthau skilful (that is, creative and responsible) leadership is required to address the issues raised in a post-Nietzschean age characterised by nihilism and disenchantment. Morgenthau's discussion of leadership within the context of democratic regimes is a case in point. In Morgenthau's interpretation, just like in Weber's, the advantage of 'leader-democracy' over 'leaderless democracy' stems from the fact that the former furthers the creative power-politics of great politicians, while the former tends to the 'diminution of control or, more precisely, to a lightening of the burden of leadership' (Mommsen quoted in Stammer 1971, p. 116). While echoing Weber, whose thinking was characterised by 'a markedly aristocratic individualism' throughout his life (Mommsen quoted in Stammer 1971, p. 114), Morgenthau is in this regard not very far from Nietzsche's interpretation either, for whom history gained meaning only from the creative activity of great personalities (Mommsen quoted in Stammer 1971, p. 114).

In his analysis of leadership, Morgenthau often points to what he takes to be the two constituting realms of politics - the ephemeral and the perennial – and therefore

introduces the issue of tradition in the discussion. In Morgenthau's words, expressed in his seminal preface to *The Decline of Democratic Politics*, 'both the tradition of political thought and the contemporary experience of political life (...) contain two elements: one contingent and ephemeral, the other necessary and perennial' (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 1). In facing the realm of the ephemeral - made up of situations informed by particular contexts - the statesman must act with a view to the teachings of the tradition of political thought, and moreover, he must recreate and adapt the latter, so as to fit his present day experiences. There are indeed strong reasons for taking the view that in Morgenthau's account, there is no tension between these realms. He regards them as forming two equally important frameworks, against which the statesman's skills are tested. Differing from the behaviouralists, who emphasise predictability and calculation in politics, Morgenthau's vision is built upon an account of the human agent who is perceived as unpredictable and thus unlikely to conform to such calculations. Moreover, it places a considerable burden of responsibility on the superior actor's shoulders, who has to constantly move between universality (tradition) and particularity (current political events), and to absorb knowledge and inspiration from the former so as to skilfully tackle developments within the latter. In Morgenthau's interpretation, men contemporaneously live in a period of history characterised by 'the breakdown of universal religion and universal humanism', in which old ideas, old practices and old institutions 'become obsolete very quickly - they are no longer able to fulfil their purpose' (Lecture 16, 6 February 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 7). Within this context, 'it is vitally important that these traditional modes of thought and action be adapted quickly, and if necessary, radically to new circumstances' (Lecture 16, 6 February 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 7). The importance of this back-

and-forth movement between tradition and innovation is captured by Morgenthau in a significant paragraph from an unpublished lecture, in which he argues that

The fate of the United States and of the civilized world will depend upon the speed and adequacy with which the United States will be able to rediscover the perennial foundations of its foreign policy, and to adapt that foreign policy to the changed conditions of a revolutionary age (Lecture 16, 6 February 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 7).

The ephemeral and unpredictable is difficult to accommodate and intimidating, and Morgenthau is well aware of this. In one of his early unpublished lectures, he asserts that an element of art enters into the solution of political problems, and is keen to emphasise that this to him is 'more than a metaphor' (Lecture 28, 18 March 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 13). You have to be a creative artist 'in order to feel the distribution of power at a particular moment, to see the relation of the different aspects of the problems to each other, and to find a stable solution for this particular problem' (Lecture 28, 18 March 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 13). At the highest level of international politics, 'there is much less of a science than of the gamble or "art" of international politics', and the insecurity with which the statesman is confronted stands as one of the most challenging features of his mission (Lecture 17, 8 February 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 4). The 'true' statesman is the one who faces not just tradition, but also everyday experience successfully, and throughout his actions, he re-imbues the political with meaning, and re-enchants the world. Taking into account the importance of the statesmen's enterprise, Morgenthau's lamenting of the current situation, characterised by lack of

diplomatic excellence, is not at all surprising. To him, regrettably, the diplomatic art has recently degenerated, and even 'died out', and the diplomat has started to look like 'a mere relic of the past' (Lecture 20, 15 February 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 11). As Morgenthau insists, immediate action is needed, in order for these trends to be reversed.

Morgenthau directs his critique to the unskilled diplomacy, whose rigid proponents embrace rationalization and are afraid of the changes which are part and parcel of the political. Moreover, he criticises present day diplomats for the fear of the unknown which makes them apply the teachings of tradition in a canonical way, which does not take the contextual factors into account. In the book *In Defense of the National Interest*, Morgenthau condemns what he calls 'the abdication of leadership', whose manifestations in the field of policy are 'thrift, muddling, improvidence, and fear of the new and unknown' (Morgenthau 1982, p. 237). In Morgenthau's account, the unpredictability of the political environment should not frighten, but inspire. More importantly, while confronted with the unpredictable, the diplomat/statesman is given the opportunity to demonstrate his creative potential, and this should not be missed.

A fluctuating, always evolving factor which the statesman has to take into consideration and address, is the national interest. By contrast to the abstract, blueprint like teachings of the proponents of liberal internationalism, the national interest is a variable, and it challenges the statesman by virtue of its changing nature. While thinking in terms of the national interest, 'conceived as power among other powers', the statesman 'must take the long view, proceeding slowly and by detours, paying with small losses for great advantages; he must be able to temporize, to compromise, to bide his time' (Morgenthau 1982, p. 223). As Morgenthau warns in

his book *In Defense of the National Interest*, ‘a foreign policy guided by moral abstractions, without consideration of the national interest, is bound to fail; for it accepts a standard of action alien to the nature of the action itself’ (Morgenthau 1982, pp. 33-34). This does not mean, however, that the national interest is devoid of moral purpose. As noticed by Good, Morgenthau invests the national interest with moral content, and thus endows it with a transcendent frame of reference: ‘while constructed from the raw materials of self-interest, self-preservation and power, Morgenthau’s “national interest” incorporates in its design a notion of responsibility that by its nature must transcend pure self-interest’ (Good 1960, p. 610). In his analysis, Good points to the transcendental character of Morgenthau’s notion of national interest both approvingly and critically, and he draws attention to what he takes to be Morgenthau’s ‘excessively’ transcendental views (as shown in the previous section, Good is not alone in criticising the ‘excess of transcendence’ on Morgenthau’s part (see also Frei 2001):

In relating interest to principles, Morgenthau, to say the least, is ambivalent. Indeed, the overall impact of his thought leads one to conclude that Morgenthau’s concept of principle is so transcendental that it can play only a judgmental role in the life of political, sinful man, saving him from hypocrisy (by demonstrating to him that he is not God), but not necessarily saving him from cynicism (by failing to demonstrate that he is more than a beast) (Good 1960, p. 613).

As mentioned earlier, Morgenthau’s theory makes reference to two coordinates, one temporary, the other perennial - as Good puts it, Morgenthau ‘sees two realms, the realm of the actual characterized by “the misery of politics”; and the realm of the

universal ethical norm' (Good 1960, p. 613). The second level of Morgenthau's account of leadership therefore concerns the statesman's response to the perennial realm of values and teachings brought to us by the past ages. As we have seen, to Morgenthau political creativity is not synonymous with political action for action's sake, it does not lead to purposeless relativism, or means that 'anything goes'. For Morgenthau, the statesmen's creativity always manifests itself within the confines of a tradition, with which their deeds must be in accord, and against which these must always be judged. Subsequently, as emphasised in an unpublished lecture, Morgenthau argues that the traditional methods of diplomacy must be adapted to the ever-changing conditions of the international environment, yet at the same time 'their objective, rational essence must be preserved' (Morgenthau 1957a, p. 8). This to Morgenthau appears to be the main task posed by the rediscovery of the traditions of diplomacy, 'for both the theoretical observer, and the practitioner of diplomacy' (Morgenthau 1957a, p. 8).

The statesmen's rediscovery and then propagation of the eternal truth and the perennial laws of foreign policy, 'as they have been formulated throughout the ages' (Morgenthau 1946d, p. 12), is of utmost importance to Morgenthau. The meaning imposition exercised by superior individuals is necessary in order to avoid what we could call 'negative destruction', and these heroes' actions, which at a first glance may appear destructive themselves, are in the end portrayed by Morgenthau positively. By giving politics its meaning back, through genuine statesmen's interventions, order and peace are likely to be brought into the picture of reality.

As emphasised by Morgenthau, any 'true' political culture faces the facts of political life, but at the same time it transcends those facts 'in terms of a moral conception of life' (undated, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 15). The need for a

stable ground, able to provide the necessary all-encompassing meaning and truth, and to counteract the likely destructive effects of the fight for meaning imposition, is therefore imperative. As emphasised by Morgenthau in *Truth and Power*, the establishment of peace does depend upon the application of 'political intelligence' to international problems, and this is what for Morgenthau represents 'the supreme task of diplomacy': 'to create out of disparate and contradictory national interests a higher harmony' (Morgenthau 1970, p. 107). As Morgenthau puts this in a talk at the US Army War College, 'the ultimate goal of all statesmanship, of all politics (...) is to reconcile conflicting interests, to mitigate them, to accommodate them in a peaceful manner' (Morgenthau 28 September 1959, Morgenthau Papers, Box 170, p. 17). Meanwhile, in an earlier statement, he argues that

We need an intelligent and responsible foreign policy, we need intelligent and responsible statesman to formulate it and to put it into effect, and we need skilful diplomats, who in the daily give-and-take of diplomatic negotiations, are able to prevent frictions from degenerating into open conflicts, to iron out difficulties, and to solve real conflicts of interest by peaceful negotiation and compromise (Morgenthau July 1945, Morgenthau Papers, Box 168, p. 2).

A few potential problems arise from Morgenthau's vision of the statesman, and they mainly stem from Morgenthau's insufficient clarification of the concept. Nobel for instance questions the statesman's relationship to rationalism, and notes the rational 'essence' of Morgenthau's account of politics. He argues that 'far from venting his lust for power on the world, Morgenthau's statesman represents the essence of rationality', and he is 'the wholly disinterested guardian of that supreme

abstraction of realist theory: the “national interest” (Nobel 1995, pp. 65, 80). In Nobel’s account, Morgenthau’s theory is ‘essentially a model of rational politics’, ‘a critical instrument rather than an explanatory one’, which although derived from historical experience, has sought ‘to transcend that experience’ (Nobel 1995, p. 81). In Nobel’s view, the theory of power politics ‘stood in the way of a proper understanding of practical problems, rather than helping to resolve them’, and the rational essence/rational map of the political process, which Morgenthau ‘believed could be read from the historical record’, was ‘elusive’, ‘inaccurate and even misleading’ (Nobel 1995, pp. 81-2).

The present analysis acknowledges and agrees with Nobel’s assessment regarding the statesman representing the essence of rationality, but argues that its author overlooks the distinction present in Morgenthau’s works between rationalism and rationality (see the argument developed in chapter 3 of the thesis). As emphasised by Molloy, in Morgenthau’s account, ‘where rationalism provides merely an illusion of control over knowledge derived from a traditionalist interpretation of science, rationality is an effective approach to knowledge, it is what makes knowledge possible in international relations’ (Molloy 2004, p. 3). Morgenthau hangs on to a vision of rational politics, and he does this with good reason: in his account rationality can help meaning imposition, and the responsible actor, by using his reason amongst others, avoids the dangers of succumbing under the temptation of action for action’s sake. This is a productive account of rationality, which points to its creative possibilities, and therefore endows it with a positive connotation in the context of the analysis of meaning imposition as a creative endeavour par excellence.



As seen above, on the one hand, Morgenthau asks the statesman to disregard the findings of scientism, and to fight against the disenchantment brought by the latter trend of thought. Morgenthau is aware that the political actor's mind seeks the predictability to which it is accustomed from domestic politics, 'meticulous ascertainment of the facts, precise planning, and elaborate organization years in advance' (Morgenthau 1970, p. 149). Subsequently, he tries to raise the statesman's awareness that this kind of certainty is impossible to be achieved in an unpredictable realm of political experience: the statesman 'must cross the Rubicon without knowing how deep and turbulent the river is, or what he will find on the other side' (Morgenthau 1970, p. 147). Rather than seek unattainable knowledge, he must reconcile himself to ineluctable ignorance (see Morgenthau 1970, p. 147). As Morgenthau expresses this view clearly in *Truth and Power*,

The decision of the statesman has three distinctive qualities. It is a commitment to action. It is a commitment to a particular action that precludes all other courses of action. It is a decision taken in the face of the unknown and the unknowable (Morgenthau 1970, p. 146).

On the other hand, however, in Morgenthau's interpretation re-enchantment does not exclude systematic knowledge, on the contrary. In *Science: Servant or Master?* – a book which contains a fierce critique of scientism and technology - Morgenthau preaches the cause of a living political philosophy understood as 'a rational guide to political action', and he argues that it is indeed the vital task of our age 'to transform the shock of wonderment that has its source in politics to the theoretical, systematic understanding of that source' (Morgenthau 1972, p. 33). Acting in the spirit of this

demand, as mentioned earlier, Morgenthau's superior political hero must 'take the long view, proceeding slowly and by detours, paying with small losses for great advantages; he must be able to temporize, to compromise, to bide his time' (Morgenthau 1982, p. 223). Moreover, he must demonstrate what Morgenthau calls a 'realist reasoning', which is 'based upon the calculations of advantage and disadvantage'. He must always calculate, and make 'a rational choice between peace and war' (Morgenthau 1959, p. 6).

Nobel's assessment above implies that at this point the statesman is likely to turn into a rationalist subject himself, and by doing this, instead of fighting disenchantment, he may become an exponent and a propagator of it. Taking into account Morgenthau's critique of rationalization and of its proponents, it can be argued that his account of the calculating superior actor is more like reminiscent of Weber's notion of prudence, and that he does not think of his wise hero as a being a rationalist actor, of the kind which, as seen in the previous section, he is so keen to criticise. Moreover, as emphasised in an earlier paragraph, Morgenthau maintains the distinction between rationalism and rationality, and argues that the latter can help the implementation of a thoughtful politics. Nevertheless, due to the insufficient explanation of his ambivalent stance on the issue, these positions, largely unaddressed in Morgenthau's work, are easily likely to be seen as contradictory. In a letter sent to Michael Oakeshott in 1948, Morgenthau agrees with Oakeshott's criticism on the topic, and acknowledges that his attempts 'to make clear the distinctions between rationalism and rational inquiry, scientism and science', had been 'in vain' (Morgenthau, 22 May 1948, Morgenthau Papers, Box 44, p. 1).

Morgenthau's views about the statesman's impact on tradition, and his concept of creativity in political thought, lead to other important questions: how can the

statesman be creative, when what he is advised by Morgenthau to discover, are the old 'perennial forces'? If 'truth' is the truth of tradition, then what is the input of the present, and is there really any value in it, apart from the value given by the re-reading – be it skilful - of the wisdom provided by the past? As seen from above, the present interpretation argues that Morgenthau's two realms of the political are intermingled, and they work in harmony towards providing the skilful actor with the opportunity to affirm his political creativity. The statesman does have an input in these endeavours, and as explained earlier, he does not simply replicate the teachings of tradition, but recreates them with an eye to present day developments. This vision implies coherence, and the argument developed here maintains that Morgenthau's account on the topic is coherent. Nevertheless, we cannot fail to see it as likely to be perceived as contradictory, due to the lack of explanation on Morgenthau's part. As argued in previous chapters, Morgenthau often failed to provide a detailed analysis of his concepts. In this case as well, the meaning and scope of the statesman's creativity can easily be questioned due to Morgenthau's scarce explanation of his vision of creative leadership.

While some philosophers are 'constructive', others - Morgenthau included - 'eradicate error, disinfect a region of human self-deception, and show that certain beliefs, even if they can still be held, cannot be held in the old way'. These are Martin Wight's words, taken from his review of Morgenthau's *Dilemmas of Politics* (Wight 1959). The argument here builds on this assessment and points to one of Morgenthau's most important contributions in the field of political theory. Following the 'death of God', humans in general, and political leaders in particular, have to reconsider their relationship with a world characterised by nihilism and disenchantment, and they must strive to re-enchant it by using their creative

capacities. Moreover, while doing this, Morgenthau tells us, they must also take into account the wisdom of a thoroughly questioned past, whose merits and value should nevertheless be acknowledged. How do we come to terms with the unique *and* the familiar, with moral and political creativity on one hand, and moral and political submission to tradition, on the other? In our judgments, should we treat one of these two realms preferentially? Morgenthau's theory of leadership provides answers to such questions, by equally emphasising the realm of contingency and that of permanence, the ephemeral and the everlasting. In Morgenthau's account, these realms are equally important: while the current political context provides the actors with the opportunity to exercise their creativity, tradition forms that realm of 'true' knowledge and universal ethics with which the actor's deeds must always be in harmony in order to avoid a politics of action for action's sake, which Morgenthau constantly criticises on normative grounds. Following from this, for Morgenthau, the purpose of each new political age should be one of rediscovering tradition - that 'store of objective, general truths' inherited by us from the past' (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 45) - but also of making it 'speak' to the present relevantly: as Morgenthau puts it, 'to rediscover and reformulate the perennial problems of political ethics, answering them in light of the experience of the age' (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 1). While decrying the 'death of God' and the advent of moral nothingness, Morgenthau pleads for 'a new approach, which could foster a system of binding values, justifying the boldest adventures and truly great endeavours' (Morgenthau quoted in Frei 2001, p. 154). Because he wants to avoid action for action's sake, Morgenthau longs for 'new ties, that once again embed human life in a broad spiritual system, and thereby imbue it anew with meaning and sacredness' (Morgenthau quoted in Frei 2001, p. 154).

This chapter has analysed Morgenthau's account of tradition in both moral and epistemological terms, and has pleaded for a reconsideration of it, in light of the central place it occupies in Morgenthau's theory. It has also pointed to Morgenthau's use of a particular conception of man in order to stabilize the meaning of politics, and thus to avoid absolute relativism, and has analysed Morgenthau's concept of superior leadership. Moreover, it has pointed to the potential sources of criticism in Morgenthau's theory: an 'excessively transcendental' vision of ethics; an allegiance to moral values which are never spelled out clearly; an insufficiently detailed account of the scope of political creativity; a vision of the statesman which, since missing a clear distinction (to be made by Morgenthau) between rationalism and rationality, may be read as a plea in favour of rationalist politics, which Morgenthau is otherwise keen to criticize.

The final chapter of this thesis will draw together the findings arrived at in the present interpretation, which regard the role of Nietzsche and Weber in the articulation of Morgenthau's perspective, Morgenthau's endorsement of the 'death of God' diagnosis, the centrality of the topic of meaning in his account, power as meaning imposition, the disenchantment of human life and politics, and Morgenthau's concept of the creative leader. It will also provide an evaluation of Morgenthau's theory, stressing its importance for 21<sup>st</sup> century International Relations, and emphasising the need to revisit Morgenthau and his solution to the apparent contradictions and dichotomous choices of modernity and postmodernity.

## **6. Conclusion: Hans Morgenthau's Discussion of Meaning, Disenchantment and Leadership**

This chapter rounds off the arguments developed throughout the thesis, highlighting the key points arrived at in previous chapters, and indicating their originality by reference to other evaluations of Morgenthau's theory. This chapter also points to certain issues in Morgenthau's account which have attracted criticism, and spells out the position taken in the thesis. The chapter ends with an assessment of the importance of Morgenthau's thought for the modernity/postmodernity dichotomy as manifested in International Relations, indicating its relevance to debates related to the death of universal values and the legitimacy of a singular meaning and truth.

The first original element brought by the present thesis concerns the idea that Morgenthau's thought is not essentially modern, dichotomous and contradictory as assumed by some scholars, but works within a dynamic understanding of the modernity/postmodernity dichotomy. It provides a sophisticated account which both challenges modernity's endorsement of totalities, and pays tribute to the need for metaphysical certainty. The thesis has spelled out the way in which Morgenthau's thought is at the crossroads of modernity and postmodernity, understood as moods and attitudes towards knowledge and values, and his writings express a complex awareness and an allegiance to both attitudes. This finding is important because it

paves the way to an understanding of Morgenthau which explains his commitment to certain positions too easily dismissed as contradictory by observers.

Moreover, the thesis has demonstrated the crucial continuity in Morgenthau's political theory. Morgenthau shows a commitment to an orientation and to ideas which remained constant throughout his life. Starting from Morgenthau's few and scattered but solid references to the importance of Nietzsche's and Weber's thought in the shaping of his perspective, the argument here has unpacked the strong connection between Morgenthau, Nietzsche and Weber. Morgenthau's experiences in native Germany, as well as the affinities between Morgenthau and Nietzsche, and Morgenthau and Weber, have been analysed by some scholars already (see Turner and Factor 1984, Frei 2001). Nevertheless, no analyst has so far linked Morgenthau with Nietzsche and Weber in a single account, and the literature has not indicated before the Weberian influence on Morgenthau as representing a political institutionalization of Nietzschean assumptions. The present reading has addressed these connections in chapter 2, while in chapters 3, 4 and 5, it has demonstrated their importance in the articulation of Morgenthau's theory, while also indicating Morgenthau's innovative reworking of central Nietzschean and Weberian concepts.

Closely related to this issue, another original element discussed by the present reading is that of 'the disenchantment of politics', which represents a topic of utmost concern to Morgenthau in this interpretation. Morgenthau decries the employment of methods pertaining to natural sciences in the field of the social sciences, and claims that rationalist approaches do not provide the real meaning of politics, which to him is represented by the unpredictable, always evolving struggle for power. On the contrary, rationalization disenchants politics and imposes upon it a certainty of meaning which is unattainable in this field. The Aristotelian 'shock of wonderment',

the mystery of politics referred to often by Morgenthau, succumbs under technological developments which do not tell us anything about its intrinsic meaning.

The fourth original finding discussed in this interpretation concerns Morgenthau's account of the human agent and his leadership theory in particular, which are closely connected to the ideal of re-enchantment. Morgenthau's genuine statesman stands as a creative force which can counteract disenchantment, work out a fruitful interpretation of the tradition of political thought, and re-imbue the political with meaning and values. In Morgenthau's account, man's destiny is creation, and the statesman is given the opportunity to create on the political scene by imposing a meaning which overcomes the dangers likely to accompany the aftermath of the 'death of God'. The meaning of political creativity is unveiled in the statesman's struggle to impose interpretations in a responsible manner, while holding an awareness and skilful anticipation of the consequences of his impositions.

The thesis started with an outline of the meanings of modernity and postmodernity to be employed in the thesis, with an emphasis on the concept of postmodernity as a mood within modernity. It also explored the modernity/postmodernity dichotomy in International Relations, and indicated their diverging claims regarding the universality of moral values and the gaining of knowledge. The introductory chapter also stressed the importance of Nietzsche's diagnosis – 'God is dead' – for the unfolding of a postmodern stream of thinking which questioned modernity's appeals to totality in moral and epistemological terms. Within this context, the thesis introduced Morgenthau's works, and pointed within the literature survey to scholars' reading of them as being built upon modernity's firm soil of certainty and belief in epistemological absolutes.



While chapter 2 focused on Morgenthau's intellectual upbringing in native Germany, with both the positive and negative influences, on his reading of Nietzsche and Weber, and on his intellectual trajectory in the US, chapter 3 showed that Morgenthau's metaphysics was based on a philosophical outlook which agreed with Nietzsche's and Weber's diagnosis of the death of God, and pointed to the disenchantment of human life as a development likely to trigger disastrous consequences. The thesis thus went further than current interpretations which point to Morgenthau's concern with values in politics with little further clarification, by taking the step of discussing the centrality of the death of the God of universal values in Morgenthau's account, and his subsequent scholarly interest in the idea of meaning. As shown in chapter 3, Morgenthau points to the disintegration of a universal realm of values and knowledge, and acknowledges the plurality of truths which follows the demise of universality. His theory is built on perspectivist assumptions and on a certain kind of relativism informed by an awareness of historical and cultural differences, and it emphasises the importance of the observer's 'personal equation', which is subject to change and varies in accordance to the contextual factors.

Morgenthau's account is informed by an individualist ontology, and he places human agents at the center of his interpretation of disenchanted life and politics. Morgenthau's individual experiences a 'metaphysical shock' (Morgenthau 1972, p. 27), and searches for security, still longing for a certainty which cannot be attained under present conditions. In Morgenthau's view, the search for a singular meaning is therefore in vain. Most importantly, he argues that after the death of God, a fight for meaning imposition ensues among individuals. According to Morgenthau, the world now resembles a stage on which actors are engaged in a continuous struggle for

meaning imposition, for the victory of one's values and interpretation of the world upon the others. In a post-Nietzschean world, the meaning of power is meaning imposition for Morgenthau, and man, meaning and power make up a conceptual triad which characterises politics as a dynamic and sophisticated realm. Morgenthau employs a relational understanding of power, and the essence of politics is revealed in this ongoing struggle for meaning imposition among various agents, which constitutes a mosaic of human relations unpredictable in both the means employed by the agents, and the results attained. Meaning imposition as a form of power is a move consciously made in the thesis, and this interpretation, unlike that of power as influence, is more fruitful in depicting the creative potential of power, in both its positive and negative outcomes. The reading of power as meaning imposition points to the creativity of power unequivocally, and challenges materialistic readings of Morgenthau's theory which overlook the creative facet of the power phenomena which Morgenthau continuously emphasises in his works.

While chapter 3 examined Morgenthau's metaphysics, chapter 4 focused on Morgenthau's translation of his metaphysics into an understanding of politics. In this context, the theme of the disenchantment of politics was introduced and discussed. As mentioned in chapter 4, the analysis of Morgenthau's critique of rationalization is far from new. The novelty brought by the thesis is represented by the in-depth analysis of the issue of the disenchantment of politics, with an emphasis on Morgenthau's concern with the loss of meaning in politics. Morgenthau is preoccupied with the concept of meaning and with the downfall of universal values, and his political theory is permeated by a critical examination of present day interpretations of politics that overlook the moral issues and dynamic, unpredictable developments which to Morgenthau are part and parcel of the political.

As argued in chapters 3 and 4, in Morgenthau's account the concepts of destruction and transcendence are constituted within a dynamic relationship, and their differentiation stems from humans' use of power understood as meaning imposition. If employed irresponsibly, power leads to destruction. If used responsibly, it paves the way to transcendence. At one pole, one notices the issue of destruction in Morgenthau's theory, a destruction which finds its origin in humans' 'lust for power', and is endowed with a limitless character. The individual's destructive potential is aided by technological developments which may pave the way to total destruction, hence the tragic nature of the 'death in the nuclear age', which to Morgenthau represents a symbol of meaninglessness. In a time with no values universally endorsed, man is likely to return to an obscurantist, aimless activism. Expressing his horror at the action for action's sake philosophy endorsed by the Nazis, Morgenthau argues that activism per se does not provide man with answers to the 'metaphysical shock', that salvation from 'empirical misery' and 'metaphysical doubt' is not possible by means of acting in this way (Morgenthau 1971, pp. 622-3). In this context, he argues against filling in the aftermath of the death of God with a philosophical attitude which celebrates creativity for its own sake.

At the other pole of Morgenthau's account of the human, one finds responsible creation and re-enchantment, which are promoted by the statesman/diplomat. The meaning of creative political thought is unveiled in the actions of the exceptional character who skilfully reformulates 'the old'. As Morgenthau asserts in his 'American foreign Policy' lecture, the main task of the US is to resuscitate traditional interests and methods: 'the future of humanity depends on this enterprise, of rediscovering the perennial foundations of its foreign policy and of adapting that

foreign policy to the changed conditions of a revolutionary age' (Morgenthau 24 June 1954, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 2).

For Morgenthau, the purpose of each new political age is that of rediscovering tradition - that 'store of objective, general truths' inherited by us from the past' (Lecture 4, 9 January 1946, Morgenthau Papers, Box 169, p. 7) – but also of making tradition relevant to the present developments on the political arena. In this interpretation, political creativity means a skilful, contextually aware reinterpretation of tradition, and not a dogmatic or un-reflexive following of it: it means 'to rediscover and reformulate the perennial problems of political ethics, answering them in light of the experience of the age' (Morgenthau 1962a, p. 1). Within this context, the importance of the statesman's mission is extraordinary to Morgenthau. Aware of the plurality of interpretations of tradition in the aftermath of the death of God, the statesman must have the intellectual and political qualities to make a responsible choice, and to impose his vision of tradition creatively, in a non-destructive way, which celebrates plurality as well as disciplines it. He fights disenchantment by virtue of his constructive and responsible vision.

As pointed out in chapter 5, this thesis also acknowledges the ambiguities contained in Morgenthau's account. The literature survey performed at the beginning of the thesis has emphasised the abundance of Cold War assessments which point to the alleged amorality of Morgenthau's theory. Meanwhile, while acknowledging Morgenthau's consideration of moral values in politics, other scholars have criticised the insufficient explanation of the values envisaged, and also Morgenthau's too transcendental universal ethical norm (see Good 1960, p. 613). Perceived as nothing more than an advocate of a cold-blooded struggle for power, Morgenthau ended up being criticised for what he used to condemn forcefully: the neglect of moral

considerations in the interpretation of events in the international political arena. The argument developed here has made the case that moral commitments are far from temporary or accidental in Morgenthau's account. On the contrary, his theoretical edifice presupposes a moral foundation, and the moral aspects of his thought arise from a particular metaphysical outlook. Having discussed Morgenthau's concern with values at length, this thesis has brought convincing arguments to refute the views above, which spring from a superficial or partial reading of Morgenthau, regarding Morgenthau's neglect of moral considerations. It has shown that Morgenthau creatively re-worked a particular metaphysical position from Nietzsche and Weber, which was informed by a concern with the idea of meaning as generated by values.

Chapter 5 of the thesis also focused on another stream of criticism directed at Morgenthau, concerning the issue of the statesman looking suspiciously like a proponent of rationalism. On the one hand, Morgenthau asks the statesman to fight against scientism. Aware that the political actor's mind seeks the predictability to which it is accustomed from domestic politics, 'meticulous ascertainment of the facts, precise planning, and elaborate organization years in advance' (Morgenthau 1970, p. 149), Morgenthau attempts to raise the statesman's awareness that this kind of certainty is impossible to be achieved. In Morgenthau's account expressed in *Truth and Power*, the statesman must 'commit himself to a particular course of action in ignorance of its consequences, and he must be capable of acting decisively in spite of that ignorance', and here Morgenthau seems to contradict his previous assertions regarding wise and responsible, consequence-oriented leadership. Rather than seek unattainable knowledge, the statesman must 'reconcile' himself to ineluctable ignorance (see Morgenthau 1970, p. 147).

On the other hand, however, in Morgenthau's interpretation re-enchantment does not exclude systematic knowledge. As Morgenthau puts it in an unpublished lecture, the statesman must demonstrate a realist reasoning 'based upon the calculations of advantage and disadvantage'. He must always calculate, and make 'a rational choice between peace and war' (Lecture 11, 15 May 1962, Morgenthau Papers, Box 171, p. 14). The statesman thus seems to turn into a rationalist subject himself, and by doing this, instead of fighting disenchantment, he is likely to become its propagator.

The thesis has argued that this is a superficial tension in Morgenthau's thought. Morgenthau's account of the calculating superior actor is reminiscent of Weber's notion of prudence, and moreover it fits with the view endorsed throughout the thesis, according to which Morgenthau retains a distinction between rationalism and rationality, and he regards the latter positively. Based on an in-depth reading of all of Morgenthau's published and unpublished works, the argument developed here maintains that Morgenthau does not think of his thoughtful leader as a being a rationalist actor, but one who actively puts his reason to good use and acts in the political realm responsibly. Nevertheless, due to the insufficient clarification of his stance on the issue, Morgenthau's remarks on the calculating statesman expose him to an array of questioning such as that expressed by Nobel in his article published in 1995, and mentioned in chapter 5. In the present interpretation, assessments such as this make the mistake of overlooking the above distinction between rationalism and rationality in Morgenthau's account. Nevertheless, this reading admits that they also feed on ambiguities which Morgenthau himself did not fully address in his work.

Finally, this thesis takes issue with those assessments which have located Morgenthau's theory solely within modernity. Chapter 5 depicts Morgenthau arguing in favour of a renaissance of tradition in terms of values, knowledge and politics,

with all their metaphysical certainties. At the same time however, chapters 3 and 4 show us that he also embraces the Nietzschean and Weberian predicaments, and maintains a plurality of truths and perspectives typically postmodern, as an attitude within modernity which questions the latter's foundational assumptions (in the understanding of the term outlined in chapter 1). Morgenthau ingeniously works his way along both modernity's and postmodernity's paths, and his thought resembles a bridge which connects the two attitudes and incorporates their assumptions within a higher unity. Consequently, this thesis maintains that Morgenthau's thought contains elements which indicate a complex commitment to both modern and postmodern assumptions, both a critique of the old moral and epistemological order and an advocacy of a return to it (albeit filtered through the lenses of historical and cultural particularities). Morgenthau employs a productive way of working between the modern and the postmodern, and his writings are a proof of the possibility to do valid analyses by embracing both modern and postmodern assumptions.

According to the view advanced in this thesis, an awareness of these subtleties is needed in order to do justice to Morgenthau's all too often simplified account. Although logically contradictory to some observers, this account represents a viable model of settling politics, and it addresses dichotomies which inform the relationship between modernity and postmodernity and that between identity and difference in a way which is useful to ongoing discussions in International Relations on these topics.

The opening up of thinking space inaugurated by the postmoderns of IR has triggered re-assessments of classical realism which have encouraged the questioning of realists' allegiance to a singular meaning and truth. While questioning Morgenthau's thought similarly, the present reading has pointed to a crucial feature in Morgenthau's account: that it questions meaning, values and truth itself, albeit in

response to particular contextual elements (Nazi Germany, the Cold War, the threat of total nuclear destruction etc). This interpretation has argued that taking into account its emphasis on the treatment of difference and contingency, on the need to regard differences productively, while sticking to a flexible and creative vision of universality, Morgenthau's thought is relevant to current IR debates which are replete with issues pertaining to identity and difference and unity and multiplicity, and whose theorists attempt to find successful means for addressing divisions. The key role in Morgenthau's account is held by the statesman, whose responsible imposition of meaning transcends differences, and leads to order and construction in an otherwise anarchic environment. The resolution of divisions stands as the main question to be addressed in International Relations according to Morgenthau, and his solution places great emphasis on the superior political actor's role. In Morgenthau's interpretation, the practical skill of political leadership resolves the dichotomous choices of modernity/postmodernity and the contemporary predicament that Morgenthau perceived of the disenchantment of politics.

In some accounts, Morgenthau provided international affairs in the US 'with philosophical underpinnings that allowed it to emerge from the morass of legalistic and moralistic argumentation and to claim equal rank with other branches of the study of human affairs' (Coser 1984, p. 223). To others, he is the one who has helped 'to lay the foundation for international politics' (Thompson 1960, pp. 32-3), and 'the most brilliant and authoritative political realist' (Niebuhr quoted in Smith 1987, p. 71). As Fermi concludes, 'it would be an exaggeration to claim that Morgenthau was alone in his teachings, but it is difficult to conceive of realist principles being as powerfully communicated without his clear and fearless voice' (Fermi 1968, p. 87). This thesis has shown that Morgenthau is not only a founding father, not simply a



name and figure of the past. On the contrary, this reinterpretation, taking the debate forward in several respects, has demonstrated the present relevance of his approach, and of the issues which permeate it: the death of God, the disenchantment of politics, power as meaning imposition, thoughtful leadership as a responsible and creative meaning imposition. Morgenthau's way of tackling dichotomies, of pleading in favour of unity while also encouraging diversity, may constitute a viable theoretical model to those of us who are still searching for the meaning of a post-Nietzschean politics.

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